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LEONORA.

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LEONORA.

BY

THE HONOURABLE MRS. MABERLY,

AUTHOR OF "THE LOVE MATCH," "MELANTHE," "DISPLAY," "LEONTINE,"
OR THE COURT OF LOUIS XV."
ETC. ETC.

I would not have such a heart in my bosom for the dignity of the whole body.

MACBETH.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.



LONDON:

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LEONORA.

CHAPTER I.

THERE was a singular tumult of feeling in the breast of Leonora when she awoke on the morning that followed the eventful day of the party at the Hermitage. Ambitious hopes and gratified vanity struggled with fear—the abject fear of being hurled at once into irretrievable disgrace, from the false position she had usurped in society. But above all was the desire of rest—the pitiable craving for repose, that seemed to lift its voice above all other complainings. Was she, then, never to be at rest? Bitterly now did she deplore the past—that direful past,

with its blackening, withering consequences, stretching out over her wherever she went, like a long dark deadly shadow. Go where she might, she could not avoid it; even in her brightest hour its chill was upon her.

Her meeting with Lord Strathearn the preceding evening, had destroyed all the new-found peace which but an hour before she had enjoyed. She had scarcely begun to hope, with apparent reason, that Sir Edward's ignorance was positively genuine, when a new and more immediate danger threatened. The sudden apparition of a person who had, as he himself avowed, taken the greatest pains "to find out every thing about her," rendered her position one of ten times more imminent peril than it had hitherto been. Lord Strathearn was a perfect stranger to her; he seemed very communicative; and what was there, after all, to prevent his telling Sir Edward, or any one else, all that he might have heard. Nothing would have been more natural; for discretion is

among most people an exception, not a rule. She knew, too, that all that he had told her was true. He had evidently seen her at Florence—seen her, too, at a moment when she believed that no human eye watched her movements. This part of his tale was true; and what other information he might have had the means of obtaining, it was totally out of her power to discover. By its consequences alone could she ever become aware of its extent; and how fatal to her might the knowledge then be?

She found herself entangled in the meshes of a dilemma from which even her suppleness of spirit could not set her free. She was powerless under the crushing weight of circumstances, and must bide her time with patience, ere she knew whether she were to live or die. Had Lord Strathearn been an old or an intimate friend, her cunning mind would soon have devised some scheme for getting him into her power; but now she was completely at fault. He was an utter stranger to her: one who

seemed to have started up across her path, purposely to cloud her way. She had no hold over him, and knew nothing of his character, disposition, or views in life; any move, therefore, on her part, might be in the wrong direction; she must remain perfectly passive. This perspective was any thing but pleasing to her; for, in the disquietude of her heart, a restless desire of action seemed suddenly to have taken possession of her. But she had actually nothing to do, except to sit still and abide the course of events. Her poor father, totally unaware of all that was going on around him, could give her neither assistance nor support. It wearied her even to hear him discuss the proceedings of the day before; and his remarks upon the very persons whose names she could not hear without a degree of terror, seemed to her inconceivably puerile and tiresome.

One point alone possessed any real interest to her. When were any of those who but yesterday appeared to be on such terms of friendship to

meet again? This was a question which, before the day was half over, Leonora had repeatedly asked herself. Following the laudable example of Mrs. Percy Linklater, she had not failed to make the proper introduction between Mr. Stratford and her new friends. Farther than that she had not ventured; for she did not dare to seem in the least desirous of seeing either of them again. Her civility might have been mistaken for fear, at least on the part of Lord Strathearn, and that was an appearance she must most cautiously avoid. To his request, "that he might be permitted to call upon her at The Cliffs," she had merely returned a formally civil reply, which was not particularly encouraging; she could not therefore tell whether he would come or not. As to Sir Edward she was still more in the dark: he might relapse into another fit of seclusion, and weeks might pass away before they met again.

There were very few opportunities at Whittington for people who lived at a distance to

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meet, unless they paid morning visits, and Sir Edward was one of those persons who enjoy having their mornings undisturbed. Leonora, though far from indulging in the young ladyism of not knowing what to do with herself, was exceedingly restless and uncomfortable all that morning after the party. She could not settle to any one occupation.

After breakfast, Mr. Stratford had, as usual, retired to his books, and when he emerged from his capacious arm-chair and his studies, he announced his intention of riding over to Winton Park, for the purpose of inspecting a new farming machine, upon which Lord Glanberris was anxious to have his opinion. Leonora having declined accompanying him upon the plea of fatigue, he set out alone, and she took up her usual position in the bow-window, to watch the arrival of visitors. She was not doomed to disappointment, for, before she had been long in her place, she heard the steps of a horse rapidly approaching, and in a few moments

.

Mr. Devereux, Sir Edward's brother, cantered up to the door. The only impression that the little man had contrived to make upon her the day before, was, that of being uncommonly disagreeable; but still, as from him might be gleaned tidings of those whom she wished to see, she prepared to receive him with her sweetest smiles.

Mr. Devereux was certainly like his brother, but at the same time presented as great a contrast to him as could have been imagined. Sir Edward was tall and slight, with well-defined, rather strongly-marked, features; a broad high forehead, shaded by masses of rich brown hair, and fine grey eyes, so dark that they looked almost black. He had a very expressive and almost stern countenance until he spoke, and then his smile was so beautiful, it seemed as if rays of light were playing all over his face. Mr. Devereux, on the contrary, had the most insipid look in the world. His figure, even to his hands and feet, was short and thick; and though his features somewhat resembled those

of his brother, they were vapid and senseless; all, even the colouring which nature had bestowed upon this unlovely countenance, added to its want of charm. His hair was almost white, his eyes were of a very faded grey, and his complexion was muddy, instead of being fair. His exterior was certainly not attractive; but, as that is an imperfection which every one would correct if they could, it would have been unfair to condemn him for it, had it been suffered to stand naturally and alone. Ugly he certainly was—that he could not help; but what he could have avoided, was being the most insufferable coxcomb in the world.

A man who condescends to set up for a dandy, an exclusive, an exquisite, or any other such wretched concentration of selfishness and affectation, soon forgets how to be a gentleman. In the insane adoration of self, that good breeding which is the essence of good feeling, is speedily merged. By a man like Mr. Devereux, deference or kindness to others would have

been looked upon as vulgar condescension. His only idol was himself—his own little consequential self; and to impress others with a high opinion of its importance, appeared to be his sole object in life. His heart, however, was not radically bad, and, if he had been less vain, he might have been good-natured. Unfortunately he never gave himself time to think about other people, and therefore always appeared even more selfish than he really was.

Leonora, although endowed with considerable perspicacity, had scarcely had time to fathom this contradictory nature. She had danced with Mr. Devereux, it is true, and taken a very short turn in the garden, leaning upon his arm, therefore their conversation could not have been long; and simply classing him under the head “detestable,” she had dismissed him from her thoughts. This had been, however, the evening before. Mature reflection had since intervened, and policy resumed its sway. The brother of Sir Edward must not be so treated—the friend

of Lord Strathearn might be dangerous if overlooked. And so Leonora banished the shade of discontent from her brow; and, as Mr. Devereux entered the room, she readily advanced to meet him, and with extended hand and gladdened look, she said—

“This is very kind, Mr. Devereux, your coming so soon to see us. I am sorry my father is just gone out: he is gone to Winton Park.”

“It was you I came to see,” he replied carelessly, and taking the seat she offered him. “I met Mr. Stratford upon the road, so I knew you were alone. Do you always receive visitors alone?”

“Always!” was the laconic reply; for the tone of the speaker was new to Leonora, and struck her as being quite as extraordinary as the question.

“Gentlemen as well as ladies?” persisted Mr. Devereux, turning his eyes towards her, but not his head, his clothes being so tight he was obliged to sit bolt upright upon his chair.

"Gentlemen as well as ladies!" she echoed, drawing herself up with an air of haughtiness she could not repress.

"Some of your foreign fashions, I suppose—Strathearn told me all about the life you used to lead in Italy. I should never allow my wife to live in Italy." The blood of Leonora seemed to have turned to ice at this speech, but she only replied to the latter part of it, and forcing a smile she said—

"Your wife! I did not know you were married, Mr. Devereux; but now I remember," she added archly, "I did see you walking about yesterday with a very fat lady. Was that Mrs. Devereux?"

The round grey eyes of the little man seemed starting out of his head at this speech. To be laughed at was something incomprehensible to him, and, somewhat ruffled, he replied—

"That was Lady Olivia Tadcaster, the only person I knew besides Lady Glanberris—the

only person fit to know, I should think, about here."

"The only one!" echoed Leonora gravely, and the grey eyes turned again uneasily towards her. He was not sure whether she was laughing at him or not. She was looking down, so he could not see her eyes, and she went on—

"So you are not married, Mr. Devereux?"

"No, thank God—not I!" was the civil reply. "I am only five-and-twenty, and I don't want to be bored to death yet."

"It is better to wait a little, certainly: one can always undergo that, or any other lingering torture in the end. But," she added, not willing to appear the least conscious of his rudeness, "all people do not take so much care of themselves. We have had two weddings here within the last month. One of the brides was at the breakfast yesterday, Mrs. John Thompson—did you think her pretty, Mr. Devereux, that little fair woman in the lilac bonnet?"

"Me! I think a Mrs. John Thompson

pretty!—I never heard of such a person!” and he drew his very stiff black handkerchief higher up round his chin, and settled the pink pearl pin exactly in the middle of the ends.

“Oh!” replied Leonora, who was growing very much amused, “I know who she was: she was a Miss Clutterbuck, and old Mrs. Clutterbuck, her mother, to every one’s surprise, married the very same day a rich Mr. Winterbottom, who lives on the hill near the church. I believe he once was a hairdresser, but he is very rich. They were at the breakfast, too. How did you like the party, Mr. Devereux?”

“Bored to death! I only went there because Edward made such a point of it. I believe he is in love with that old Belinda White! He would hardly give me time to dress: actually wanted to set out at four o’clock.”

“I suppose he had promised Belinda to go early,” replied Leonora; “and I don’t think Sir Edward cares much how he is dressed.”

“I am sure he need not trouble himself

much about it here," observed his visitor, with a marked emphasis on the last word.

"He need not—he looks so well in any dress. There are few things that could improve either Sir Edward's face or figure." As Leonora said this, she suffered her eyes to fall gently down the whole length of Mr. Devereux; while the smile on her lip contradicted the rather malicious expression of her glance. He felt it rather than understood it; but his instant impression was, that the fair girl before him was secretly in love with his brother, of whom he was excessively jealous, and so he made haste to observe—

"When there is no object, people don't care much about dress. Edward gets more slovenly every day; but what is it to him? He is not a marrying man. Nothing will ever induce him to put his neck into a halter. He knows too much of the world for that."

"Sir Edward is looking very ill," observed Leonora, without deigning to take the slightest

notice of the offensive speech and manner of her new visitor, who was intent upon what he called, "putting her in her right place." And then she added in a tone of as much indifference as she could assume—

"I hope he did not suffer from being out so late last night."

"Only so much as that he has been in bed all day. His health is completely gone! I never saw a man so shattered. I don't suppose he will be up this week. I left Strathearn nursing him when I came away."

"I am very sorry to hear it!" said Leonora. "Sir Edward told me he had had a long fever; but, as he did not complain, I hoped the effects of it had quite passed away."

"They never will pass away! Take my word for it, Miss Stratford, Edward has done for himself. He will never hold up his head again as long as he lives."

"Sir Edward seems to have very strong feelings," suggested Leonora, shocked in spite

of herself at the total absence of affection or sympathy the manner of Mr. Devereux betrayed. But it was one of the anomalies of his character ; for, in spite of the manner he chose to assume in speaking of his brother, he really—apart from his petty jealousy—had a sincere affection for him.

“Strong feelings ! Do you call that feeling, Miss Stratford ? Well, thank God, I have a little more sense than to mope myself to death for no better reason than shooting some black-guard of a foreigner ! Why, I think society should have given him a medal for the riddance. Some infernal low scoundrel, I have no doubt. Italy is full of revolutionists. By the by, Miss Stratford,” he added, without observing the sudden start with which Leonora had heard his words—

“You knew the fellow he shot at Florence very well, didn’t you ? ”

“Me—not I ! ” cried Leonora, completely thrown off her guard by the suddenness of the

question; and then, as quickly perceiving the *impossibility* of a total denial, she added—

“That is—not well—not particularly well—just as people know each other in society.”

“Well, I never found any one before that knew him at all. What did he look like? Something between a hairdresser and a baboon, I suppose,” said Mr. Devereux, tenderly caressing, as he spoke, his own scanty straw-coloured whiskers.

Leonora felt as if, in spite of herself, a cry must burst from her lips: it was a few moments before she could find voice to answer, and then she said in a tone as steady as she could command—

“He was a man of very high birth—very handsome, and gentlemanlike.” The last word sounded rather disagreeably distinct to the amiable Mr. Devereux, who sneeringly observed—

“Oh! some interesting lady-killer, I suppose, with his guitar and his love sonnets. All those foreigners are such confounded puppies!”

"Have you been at Florence, or are you going there, Mr. Devereux, that you seem so anxious about Italian society?" asked Leonora carelessly, at least to all appearance.

"I don't care two straws about it!" was the civil reply. "I only asked from curiosity, as Strathearn told me you knew the man so well."

"I never saw Lord Strathearn till yesterday—so I don't think he could give you any very authentic information about me or my acquaintances," said Leonora hurriedly, as the same old feeling of terror again crept over her.

"Well, if it wasn't Strathearn, it might have been Edward; I am sure I don't recollect which: they were talking a great deal about you while we were driving home last night. A precious weary drive it was, too; and all for nothing! I wonder how people can give parties in the country, or at least expect others to go to them:" and then, as if only just per-

ceiving where he was, he added—"What a pretty house you have got here! This was old Winslow's house, wasn't it? I never saw it before; but I knew old Winslow, and a wretched old miser he was!"

"We at least have no right to say so," replied Leonora, resuming her accustomed sweetness of voice and manner. "Mr. Winslow left every thing he possessed to my father. They had been old college friends as well as school-fellows."

"Well, I dare say he tied it up pretty well!" was the next observation of Mr. Devereux, who never could let any thing pass without some disparaging remark.


"Perhaps so; but I never took the trouble of inquiring as to the conditions of the will," answered Leonora with an appearance of frankness; though she was perfectly well aware that it deprived her of all future interest in the property thus generously bequeathed to her father.

“I like that—women have no business to know any thing about money! You are not mercenary, Miss Stratford, I see,” observed Mr. Devereux, turning his body more than half round, and looking at her for the first time with an air of being pleased.

Leonora laughed outright; but a moment afterwards an expression of disgust overspread her beautiful features, and, only that Mr. Devereux had withdrawn his eyes from her face, he might have encountered a look of contempt, supreme enough to have annihilated him and his pretensions together. He was not, however, likely to see it; he was minutely examining her dress, to see if there was any thing extravagant in it. He pretended to be able always to judge of the disposition of women by their dress. There was nothing alarming in that of Leonora that day. She wore a white worked muslin gown, with a sash of dark blue ribbon; and a knot of velvet of the same colour fastened up her rich black

hair at the back of her head. Mr. Devereux seemed satisfied: her dress could scarcely have been much plainer. It was evident that her husband would always have all his money to spend upon himself.

This comfortable, and thoroughly masculine reflection, appeared to set him a little more at ease with the rest of the world than he had hitherto been, and he actually indulged in several rather complimentary speeches about the beauty of the pleasure-ground and scenery in general near Whittington, until Leonora was relieved from his tediousness by a carriage driving up to the door. Mrs. Bedingfield was announced, and the lady in the Boulogne pink bonnet glided into the room. Mr. Devereux, who held "the natives" in utter abhorrence, instantly took his leave.



CHAPTER II.

HALF an hour's conversation with Mrs. Bedingfield was rather a severe trial of patience to Leonora, harassed as she was by the alternations of hope and fear. Mrs. Bedingfield, being the *elegante* of the village, had always a great deal to say after a party of any sort; and, as Belinda White's breakfast had been much the grandest party ever given in Whittington, the display of summer dresses had been correspondently great, and the variety of new fashions very instructive. The multiplicity of dormant talents which a party in the country invariably calls forth, affords infinite pleasure to an individual of an observing mind like Mrs. Bedingfield. The wonderful resources of village dressmakers, and the realization of

the dreams of village ladies on the subject of costume, then become apparent; and marvellous are the productions that ensue.

At another time, it would have afforded Leonora no small amusement to hear the affected Mrs. Bedingfield feelingly descant upon the miserable taste of all English women in dress; she, whose sole notion of the superiority of foreign ladies in this respect, was derived from a six-weeks' sojourn at Boulogne. But now it was insupportably tiresome. Great views and large ideas were chasing each other through her brain, and she did not care about hearing a dissertation upon bonnets, or "whose gown had been turned, or whose new trimmed;" or whether the Misses Blakemore wore pink cotton under their clear muslin, or pink silk; or even the amusing fact of Mrs. Percy Linklater having begged a last year's bonnet from her dear friend, Mrs. Bedingfield, and covered it with acacia blossoms to make it look new.

All this frippery sort of gossiping seemed

suddenly to stand out in a new light, or rather in its real one, and Leonora felt almost ashamed ever to have listened to it. Her craving, however, for popularity, and the good word of every body, must induce many sacrifices; and Mrs. Bedingfield, in spite of her foolish vanities, being one of the most respectable inhabitants of Whittington, she could by no means afford to throw away her protection. And so she was obliged to listen and to smile, until her visitor, having thoroughly exhausted her store of anecdotes and elaborate descriptions of all that she had seen, and much that she ought not to have seen, in the *toilettes* of her friends on the day before, at last departed on her way. Mrs. Bedingfield had three other visits to pay, and the announcement of this fact was the only part of her conversation that interested Leonora. It was with sincere pleasure that she received her adieux, and saw her really very well-appointed brougham drive from the door.

Leonora wanted to be alone. She wanted to

think; and yet so many thoughts crowded upon her, that she did not know on which to rest. The only feeling that remained positively stationary in her mind was actual hatred of Mr. Devereux. She never remembered having met with any body who, upon so short an acquaintance, had filled her with so much dislike. He, who was so inferior to every body, appeared to believe there was no one in the world half good enough for him. His manner of speaking of his brother was odious in the extreme—a man, too, whose only fault seemed to be the fact of being his brother. And yet it was evident that Sir Edward was the model from which Mr. Devereux drew his ideas of perfection. His dress was an exact copy of that of his brother; and even his sad coloured-hair was tortured to make it as nearly as possible assume the shape into which the large natural curls of Sir Edward resolved themselves. It just followed that what was graceful and ornamental in the one case, became ridiculous in the other.

It was unfortunate that two beings so totally different should be inevitably identified with each other; but it was so, and nothing could alter it. It was impossible to look upon Mr. Devereux without thinking of Sir Edward; and it was equally impossible to think of him without laughing when his brother appeared. This similarity was a matter of no small delight to the latter; as of course his self-love never insinuated a doubt of the comparison being to his advantage. He thought himself quite as handsome as his brother, if not more so, only, in a different style. This firm impression did not, however, prevent him from taking Sir Edward for his model, with an abject servility that he would never have avowed; and he secretly carried this feeling so far, as to make it comprehend his conduct towards people as well as his choice of things. He set little value upon the acquaintance of any person, unless that person came, as it were, recommended by the preference of his brother. Then,

indeed, he would spare no pains to ingratiate himself with the favoured individual; but this arose, not from any humility of affection, that could have made him "take upon trust" the tacit recommendation of Sir Edward, but from a virulent, almost insane, jealousy. It was enough that his brother liked or admired any one, Stuart Devereux always resolved that he himself should be liked and admired still more.

This had been the secret cause of his visit to Leonora that day. He had overheard the whole conversation, relating to her, that took place between Sir Edward and Lord Strathearn; and the opinions expressed by both with regard to her marvellous beauty and grace—for, in spite of Leonora's fears, the confidences of the two gentlemen had as yet gone no further—fully convinced him that she was a person to be excessively admired. Lord Strathearn, being the bosom friend of his brother, stood nearly as high in his estimation: whatever he did was of course the right thing to do. This was in

Mr. Devereux's idea the grand epitome of all the duties of life. To have made a mistake, and admired "the wrong person," would have been a fatal error, even had the individual been endowed with every virtue and attraction possible.

In the few hours that had passed, Mr. Devereux had thought a great deal about Leonora—more indeed than he had ever thought of any woman in his life ; and for the simple reason, that it was evident Sir Edward had done the same—a reflection that cruelly hurt him in two ways. First, that his brother should have established a flirtation with a person superior to any one upon whom he could immediately fix ; and next, that such flirtation might lead to the event which he dreaded above all others, the marriage of Sir Edward—an event upon which he had looked, ever since he could remember, as the greatest misfortune that could befall him. If his brother died without leaving a son, the whole family property must descend to him, but, in the mean time, comparative

poverty must be his lot; for, by a caprice or oversight on the part of his father, no provision had been made for Stuart, and the very small portion which had been the fortune of his mother was all that he had inherited. This did not produce him quite three hundred a year; but Sir Edward allowed him a thousand a year besides: which, considering that the house of his brother, both in town and country, was always open to him, ought to have made his life a very comfortable one.

Stuart Devereux, however, was never comfortable or happy any where. His disposition prevented this being possible. He was the most discontented man in the world; so eaten up with self-love and vanity, that he never found anything which he thought the least adequate to his deserts. It would have been very difficult to have ascertained exactly how much, or what, he expected: perhaps he did not know it himself; but of one thing at least he was perfectly certain: he always wanted money, and money was

just what he never had. How was it possible? Between his race-horses at Newmarket, his hunters at Melton, and a variety of expenses in London too innumerable to mention—but of which his tailor's bill formed no inconsiderable an item—his thirteen hundred a year did not go far. Many times had he been obliged to have recourse to the generosity of his brother, who at first had only laughed at his extravagance as a boyish folly; but latterly the matter had become more serious, and, in order not to encourage him in the course he was pursuing, Sir Edward found himself obliged to put some bounds to his hitherto lavish assistance. This, however, not operating as a sufficient check, he at last declared that no further aid must be expected from him: a decision which was rendered particularly clear to the comprehension of Stuart Devereux, when, on the arrival of Sir Edward from Italy, he sent to him his usual petition for money.

The moment was singularly inopportune.

To a man weighed down by remorse for an act which in his impetuosity he had committed, one who also himself had trembled upon the brink of the grave—this constant persistence in evil courses was doubly painful. There seemed a want of honourable feeling and manly independence, in this everlasting, shopkeeper-like application for money, that disgusted as well as annoyed Sir Edward extremely. The shattered state of his own health had led him to very serious reflections; among which, not the most agreeable was the certainty that, if he died, his name must descend to one who appeared so very little likely to do honour to it. A little salutary correction might, however, be of some avail; for he was unwilling to believe in real hardness of heart. Instead, therefore, of doing as he had formerly done—replying to the application of his brother by the enclosure of a cheque for a much larger sum than that for which he asked—Sir Edward wrote in the most

touching strain. He described to him the scenes through which he had just passed, laid bare his own feelings upon the subject, and implored him, by all that he himself had suffered, to abandon the reckless course he had hitherto pursued, and render himself more worthy of the name and honours which were soon likely to be his.

This last sentence was the only part of the beautiful letter of Sir Edward, which his brother did not receive with an effusion of the very distinguished exclamations of "cant" and "bother," which were the usual appellations he bestowed upon any advice that he did not like. Stuart was surprised also, as well as indignant; for hitherto he had met with very little resistance on the part of one whose life seemed to pass in showing kindness to others. It would, however, have been much too impolitic, as well as useless, to have made his refusal a ground of quarrel; so, Stuart Devereux made up his mind to bear his present misfor-

tune as quietly as he could, and to bide his time. He therefore wrote to his brother, as if he fully entered into his ideas, and accepted the invitation so warmly offered, "that he would come down to the country to economize." And so he had duly arrived. He waited for Lord Strathearn, because to leave town with him at that time of year would be sure to attract attention, and this was one of the incessant cravings of his foolish heart; but he arrived with bitter feelings against the best of brothers.

It was this which had added so much to the natural acidity of his manner when speaking to Leonora of Sir Edward, and it had gone far to disgust her with him; more even than his appearance could have done. But he, only intent upon what he called "cutting out his brother," was exceedingly pleased with himself, and imagined that his extraordinary attention, in having been the first to pay his respects to her, had not failed to make a very deep impression.

CHAPTER III.

THE reflections of Leonora were not permitted to be of very long duration that day. Her head had been so filled with the gaudy description of shapes and colours by the conversation of Mrs. Bedingfield, that she felt as if she had been gazing on a bed of variegated tulips under a burning sun, and she longed to shut her dazzled eyes, and give herself up to her thoughts. It was not, however, to be. The fatal order had passed her lips, "that she was at home to every one," and she did not deem it prudent to recall it; so in a very few minutes another visitor was announced, and in walked no less a personage than Belinda White.

She was the only inhabitant of Whittington whom Leonora liked; but just then she would

rather have been alone. Still Belinda seldom came to talk about nothing. She generally had something to propose, or something to relate, or some good turn to do for somebody; so her visits were usually welcome. Leonora always appeared her especial care. She admired her more than it was possible to say; for, being perfectly free from jealousy, she could admire the rare gifts bestowed upon this beautiful girl. She felt anxious for her also; for her father was an old man, and had very delicate health: Belinda knew the exact state of his affairs, and, knowing also a good deal of the evils of poverty and the struggles of single blessedness, she longed to see his daughter married, or "settled" as it was always called at Whittington—where they seemed to think the terms synonymous. Perhaps they were not altogether very far wrong.

Belinda White was in particularly good spirits that day. She had gone back into the brown bonnet with the sweet peas, and was paying

her visits as usual with her umbrella in her hand, for the evening looked rather showery. After a tolerable lengthened dissertation upon the party of the day before, and the delight she had experienced in seeing every thing go off so well, the conversation came to a pause.

Leonora really had no spirits to talk—her usual vivacity seemed quite to have deserted her; but Belinda did not appear to observe it, for she still kept her seat, and the voluminous folds of her brown silk gown lay hopelessly quiet upon the sides of the arm-chair she so amply filled. She did not seem as if she ever intended to move; and she had evidently something particular to say; at last, after looking several times out of the window, as if afraid that somebody was coming, she rather hurriedly began—

“My dear, I hope you won’t be angry at what I am going to say to you?”

“Angry, Belinda! and with you!” said Leonora, gently.

“No, I’m sure you would not, my dear, now I think of it; but it’s such an awkward thing speaking to a young lady about her marriage: though I’ve made up many a good match in my time, too!” and she smiled good-naturedly. Belinda was very fond of what she called “bringing young people together.”

“Marriage!” echoed Leonora, with rather an uneasy expression overspreading her face, “but I am not going to be married—at least not that I know off.”

“My dear, I wish you were, with all my heart and soul!” was the fervent reply of Belinda, who then added—

“But you may, if you like; that I can tell you!”

“How do you mean, Belinda? I never even thought of such a thing. I have not the slightest wish to be married. You know I could not leave my father.”

“That is just what I told Mr. Selwin. I told him it was of no use.”

"Mr. Selwin!" exclaimed Leonora, in a tone of surprise.

"Yes, my dear, I may as well tell you at once. Mr. Selwin, you know, came to my breakfast yesterday; though you know he never goes out any where. Well, he only came to see you, as he explained to me afterwards."

"I am sure I am very much flattered," said Leonora, laughing. "An old ugly man with a bald head!"

"Well, I can't say he is very handsome; but he has a very good living not four miles from this, and he thinks you would make an excellent clergyman's wife; and so, as he is very bashful himself, he came to me this morning to beg I would just speak a word for him, and see if there was any use in his coming here, and asking you himself."

"I am sure I am very much obliged to him," replied Leonora; "but nothing should induce me to marry any one: at all events just now."

"That is just my view of the case," said Belinda, looking very wise. "I have my reasons."

Leonora said nothing, but smiled; for she knew that, in another moment, she would hear them all without asking a single question.

"I'll tell you what, my dear—my idea is this. Mr. Selwin is a very excellent man, but he is too old for you; and you are much too handsome to be only a clergyman's wife. You must marry some one who will take you into the gay world, and give you a great position."

The heart of Leonora so sincerely responded to this idea, that she gave a very approving look at her companion, who, pleased with her own elucidation of the subject, went on—

"Now you see, my dear, it is not every pretty girl that makes a great match; or else how would there be such a number of old young ladies in the world? But a great many lose their opportunity by looking too high. I have

seen it hundreds of times. It is a great mistake, depend upon it!"

"But, my dear Belinda—I do not look at all, either high or low, that is just the difference. I have told you already, I have not the least intention of marrying. Why do you want to force me? Do you want to get me away from Whittington?" She asked this with so innocent a smile, that her hearer forgot to answer, she was looking so admiringly at her, and Leonora added—"There is nothing I should hate so much as being obliged to marry."

"Mr. Selwin, perhaps?" observed Belinda, slyly.

"Any one! I am perfectly happy as I am," answered Leonora, decidedly; for she was most anxious that this false idea should be largely disseminated, as she knew it would be, if once firmly impressed upon the mind of Belinda White.

"Nonsense, my dear child!" exclaimed the latter affectionately; "you are not going to

shut yourself up here for ever, I hope. That would be a pretty end to come to!"

"As long as my father lives I certainly shall," was the reply in a firm tone.

"And how can you tell how long that may be? How can any of us tell? And then you will have thrown away all your chances. No, no—we must not let you do that!"

The word "chances" grated harshly on the ear of Leonora; particularly as at that moment she happened to remember that her four-and-twentieth birth-day was some time passed: and she replied in rather a quieter tone—

"At all events, my dear Belinda, do not give Mr. Selwin any false hopes. There is nothing I think so unfair, and so dishonest. Tell him at once, that I positively decline marrying him; but that I am fully aware of the great compliment he pays me by wishing it. I have a great regard for Mr. Selwin: I think him an excellent man."

"Good girl!" cried Belinda, with the tears

coming into her eyes. "You are a high-minded, honourable girl, and whoever is your husband will have found a treasure. I know who I should like to select for the happy man," and she nodded her head, mysteriously as she thought, while her kind face brightened up again.

"Well, I'm sure I don't know whom you would choose, Belinda. You don't want me to accept Mr. Selwin. Perhaps you would like Mr. Townsend, our other clergyman, better—he is not so very old; I dare say not much more than fifty, and wears an admirable wig? Or, perhaps," added Leonora, with increasing gravity, "you would prefer Dr. Burnaby?" and she fixed her beautiful eyes, now sparkling with mirth, upon the face of her visitor. But Belinda had grown very grave; she evidently thought all that she had said and was going to say of the utmost importance, and she had sincerely the welfare of Leonora at heart.

"No, my dear!" she replied, after a moment's



hesitation—"I will have no small marriage for you. You are not suited to it, and it would never suit you. You must marry into a good family."

"Indeed, I shall not marry at all, Belinda," said Leonora rather hurriedly; for a nervous feeling was creeping over her, as she felt that her companion was approaching the very subject upon which her own thoughts were fixed.

"Nonsense, child; don't tell me such stuff! You must, and will marry; and I know an excellent husband for you. You must marry Stuart Devereux!"

"Belinda!" exclaimed Leonora, as she leaned back in her chair; and it was the only word she could utter, for she was seized with so uncontrollable a fit of laughter that it seemed as if it never would end. In no way discomposed by the hilarity with which her proposal was received, Belinda sat quietly until the young lady was a little more composed, and then she went on bravely, and

like one who is quite sure of what they are saying—

“You see, my dear, I don’t mean to say that Stuart Devereux is in every way good enough for you, for in my opinion no one is; but we women without money are poor dependent things, after all. We must make up our minds to make the best of what we can get. One cannot always pick and choose. Believe me, you might do worse than marry Stuart Devereux.”

“And so I am to choose Mr. Devereux, as the smallest of the evils that might befall me! Certainly he is not very large,” answered Leonora, beginning to laugh again,

“My dear, when you have been married six months, you will never look at him: you won’t know whether he is tall or short. Certainly, I should have preferred Sir Edward for you; but that I fear is hopeless.”

Leonora, who did not at all coincide in this opinion, longed to ask “Why?” but she did

not dare. She was obliged, therefore, to trust to the loquacity of Belinda; who, evidently having given the matter a great deal of consideration, went on in a calm low tone, as if she was talking to herself.

“No ! Sir Edward will never marry. His mind is too much upset by that unfortunate Florence business. I doubt, too, if he will live; such a shock to the nervous system is seldom got over. Then, there is that still greater match, Lord Strathearn; no one will do much good with him, or I am very much mistaken. He thinks too much of himself. So, after all, there is no one but poor Stuart left.”

“Poor fellow ! and he must have a wife to comfort him,” observed Leonora in a pitying tone; and as Belinda (who, while she had been talking, was actively engaged in rubbing out a small spot of mud from the bottom of her beloved brown silk gown) raised her head, and looked into the face of Leonora, the same provoking smile was playing round her lips.

“Well, my dear,” said Belinda good-naturedly, “you must take your own course. You have had my opinion; but young ladies always think they know best. All I can say is, that Stuart Devereux would be a very good match for any one; he is his brother’s heir, and has great expectations. Besides, he is a marrying man, and the others are not.”

“How do you know that, Belinda?” Leonora ventured to ask, in order to appear a little interested in the matter.

“Because he told me so. He means to marry and live at Athertson, and with his brother in London; so he will have all the advantage of his large establishment.”

“And what would Sir Edward say to such an arrangement?” asked Leonora, with a studiously careless air.

“It was Sir Edward himself who proposed the plan,” was the reply, which caused a slight start from the listening Leonora. “Sir Edward,” continued her sagacious informant,

"has taken a decidedly serious turn since his misfortune, and is bent upon what he calls 'the reformation of his brother;' and he thinks a good wife and a quiet home would be the best means of effecting his wishes."

"Very possibly it might! But I do not see, my dear Belinda, what I can have to say to the matter," observed Leonora, carefully abstaining from any direct expression of her opinion. She knew that every word she uttered would be punctually repeated—not to the two brothers alone, but to the whole of the village. Every thing was public property at Whittington.

"You may have a great deal—every thing, if you like; and you certainly may have nothing. So, my dear, you must decide for yourself. But I couldn't rest in my bed if I hadn't come to tell you all I knew; and this I do know, that Stuart Devereux admires you excessively—as well he may. He has been here to day,

he tells me. I met him just as he was turning down Church-street."

It was fortunate that Belinda added these last words; for, if she had simply asked the question, whether Leonora had seen him or not, she would have had a simple answer in the negative. True to her system, the wily Leonora never told the truth except when she was certain it was already known. In this case, however, her visitor had asked and answered her own question at once, so she only replied—

"Yes! he paid me a visit this morning."

"Well! and does not that show you——" exclaimed Belinda triumphantly; and leaving the rest of the sentence to the imagination of her hearer.

"It showed me, at least, that Mr. Devereux is an extremely civil and *prévenant* person," answered Leonora with a satirical smile, that totally escaped the notice of Belinda, who hastened to add—

“Only presented yesterday, and to call upon you to day! Well, if that isn’t——”

“Very particularly attentive, indeed!” cried Leonora laughing, “at all events for England. Why, my dear Belinda, abroad people constantly call the same day; it is thought a greater civility to do so. There is an improvement on our Britannic manners, I hope!”

“Abroad!” echoed Belinda, looking rather serious; “my dear, don’t talk too much about ‘abroad,’ and your living at Florence.”

“And why not?” asked Leonora, with a growing palpitation of the heart.

“Because, my dear—remember I tell you every thing; I think it my duty towards a girl who has no mother—there is a great feeling, or prejudice if you please, among Englishmen, against young ladies who have been brought up abroad. And, poor Stuart, he is just like the rest! He told me he never would marry either a girl who had been brought up abroad,

or one that had ever received a proposal from another man. He says he intends to be quite certain that his wife has never heard the accents of love except from himself."

The slightest smile possible just gleamed over the face of Leonora at these words, and then disappeared. If Belinda White could but have guessed the extraordinary effort it cost her to repress a burst of laughter, she would not have put on the sentimental air that she did when she again began to speak. As it was, however, there was positively a tear twinkling in her eye as she said—

"After all, there is a great deal of beauty in the idea—beauty and purity: a man must have a nice mind to have such delicate thoughts. Poor Stuart! his face, perhaps, is not very handsome; but what is that compared with the mind?"

"To the intelligent faculty, 'to the contemplative, reflective, sentimental powers and qualities of the heart and brain,' as Mrs.

Blakemore would say. Certainly a snub-nose and crooked eyes are not to be compared to these heavenly gifts, nor even red hair," observed Leonora very gravely; "and as you say, Belinda, the mind of Mr. Devereux must be translucent to an uncommon degree, if he expects and exacts such purity on the part of the lady who has the happiness of being his choice."

"I am sure he does—certain!" was the answer. "He talked to me for half an hour yesterday about nothing else. But I know he means to make a little exception in your case."

"In my case!" exclaimed Leonora, looking very angry.

"Yes, my dear! Don't be alarmed—it won't do any real harm; he knows it was not your fault being brought up abroad, and I took upon myself to tell him that you did not like Italy. But he spoke of English young ladies in general; he thinks they only like going abroad by way of 'a lark,' as he called it. I am sure I don't know

any thing about it. All the young ladies I know are as pure as the driven snow—yourself, my dear, at the head of them; and so I told Stuart. Foolish fellow ! he was only talking nonsense; though I must say that I approve of his principles.”

“But not of his prejudices, I hope. It is rather hard to condemn every one who has been out of England. Look at Alice Percy, for instance; she has been a great deal abroad, and can any thing be more pure and lovely than her mind? I should think it might satisfy even Mr. Devereux himself. But, my dear Belinda, since you are so anxious to see him married, why do you not direct his attention to Alice, and all her perfections? It seems to me, she would be exactly the person to suit him.”

“She might,” answered Belinda with a smile, “if his affections were not already pretty nearly engaged. But she is too young—too childish; her father and mother would never hear of her marrying yet: and why need she ?

Remember what a splendid fortune she will have ! ”

“ And I have none,” thought Leonora, as an oppressive sadness gathered round her heart.

“ I must leave you now, my dear,” said Belinda, getting up hastily. “ I had no idea it was so late.”

“ Good bye, Belinda, and thank you—thank you very much!” answered Leonora in her sweetest manner, and tenderly pressing the hand of her friend.

“ God bless you, my dear! I shall not see you for a week; I am going to the Marklands’. Good bye! take an old woman’s advice, and be wise in time. One never knows what may happen !” And she gathered up the folds of her brown gown neatly in one hand, and, taking her umbrella in the other, soon disappeared.

CHAPTER IV.

“ONE cannot tell what may happen!” This trite saying of Belinda White’s, as she was tucking up her gown, was full of wisdom; but worldly wisdom neither can nor ought to supply the place of principles of truth and honour. Cunning may be useful and convenient; but it is the lowest species of the wisdom of the world, and is sure to defeat its own ends.

As Leonora meditated on these words, so carelessly uttered, but in a very different sense from that in which they were received—for they seemed to her a justification of all her artifices—the wiliness of her nature awoke with double force. As the days advanced, so did her difficulties seem to increase. She, however, felt herself fully equal to meet them all. Accus-

tomed to depend upon herself and her own resources, she would not seek for aid or counsel from any one, but resolved to keep her wishes and intentions as profound a secret as she hoped was the history of her past life. This to a certain degree was in her power; but, in a small gossiping place like Whittington, it was not possible to escape observation. Her movements would be chronicled, even if her thoughts were unknown. The conversation she had had with Belinda White fully confirmed her in this opinion; and she resolved that her first care should be to try and remove herself, if only for a limited period, from the eyes of such vigilant observers.

The present moment was, however, not the most favourable for such a scheme; with the prospect of having to choose between two adorers of so much consequence as Lord Strathearn and Sir Edward, it would have been madness to create difficulties by suddenly absenting herself. Of Mr. Devereux she never thought at all, except that there was

great danger of his being exceedingly in the way. It was very inconvenient for Leonora that all her three admirers happened to live in the same house; but she trusted to her own adroitness for so conducting her manœuvres as not to allow this unlucky coincidence to interfere with her plans. She had fully made up her mind as to what she intended to do. Stuart Devereux she detested and despised; nevertheless, he must be kept in good-humour lest he might do mischief; but either of the others she would instantly accept, and she doubted not that, in sufficient time, one or both could be allured into making the proposal of marriage so ardently longed for.

It was very horrible, this cool calculation, but it was the fact; and was rendered still more hideous by Leonora not even being able to plead, as if in extenuation, an utter indifference to both of the predestined victims. She, unfortunately for herself, had a very decided preference for one. She infinitely preferred

Sir Edward Devereux to any man she had ever seen. She both admired and respected him; but, so great was her ambition and love of wealth, that she was perfectly ready to sacrifice her own wishes and feelings, to secure a large fortune and brilliant position in the world.


For a little while, chance seemed to favour all her schemes. Lord Strathearn, who was very sincere in his admiration of her, had become her constant visitor; and at each visit his manner seemed more clearly to indicate that the hours which he spent in her society were by far the most precious to him. Still he had not said one word that could bind him to continue those visits, and seemed cautiously to avoid all allusion to the future. This silence might have alarmed Leonora had she had less confidence in the power of her own charms; but day after day she beheld her new admirer growing more and more enamoured, and to become Countess of Strathearn now seemed to her no very difficult task. Lord Strathearn,

too, as fortune so ordained, had had ample opportunities for preferring his suit; for as yet nothing had occurred to interfere with his visits.

Sir Edward Devereux, a prey to indisposition and concealed sorrow, had not once quitted Atherston Castle since the day his great friendship for Belinda White had induced him to make the effort of going to her party. He therefore was never in the way; and, as to Stuart Devereux, he seemed to have some magical means of appearing and disappearing exactly at the right moment; for, though he had called several times at The Cliffs, he and Lord Strathearn had never once met. All seemed, therefore, going on very smoothly for Leonora, who had hitherto apparently played her cards with consummate skill. The grand event of the proposal appeared to be at hand, and if the designing Leonora thought of the absent Sir Edward with unfeigned regret, she did not for a moment waver in her plans; but, as if to make the deed she meditated appear of a darker dye, it seemed

to her that the impression he had made upon her mind grew stronger, as all hope of becoming his wife gradually faded. With many bitter tears did she bewail her disappointment; for she certainly had imagined, from the manner of Sir Edward, that he was not indifferent to her.

As the days, however, wore on, his continued absence sorely perplexed her; but she was far from attributing it to the right cause. She fancied that he did not yet love her enough to make her society indispensable to him; while, on the contrary, his admiration had so nearly merged into affection for her, that he did not dare to approach a presence at once so perilous and so dear. Sir Edward had become, as it were, suddenly aware of his own feelings; and, while there was yet time, he had had resolution to pause. The plea of indisposition, under which he had sheltered his absence, was no idle one; for never were heart and mind more distracted by contending and contradictory emotions than had been his, ever since the day



when he had so recklessly plunged into the very danger he had promised himself to avoid.

That day when, at the breakfast at the Hermitage, he had devoted himself to her, he had studied Leonora more than he had ever yet done. Conscious of the feeling with which he had regarded her in the earlier stages of their acquaintance, he sought for an excuse to reinstate her in his heart, pure and angelic as she had once seemed to him. It is true that for a time she had been banished from it; but it needed only her seducing presence to make him question the right he had hastily to bestow such unqualified condemnation upon her. Why might he not have been deceived? His heart bounded at the idea, and each moment he passed in her society on that eventful day had more and more confirmed him in his belief. Her manner to him was so gentle and confiding, her beautiful eyes so full of tenderness, that, in spite of the terrific secret he possessed, he could not doubt her truth. His mind was

in such a state of confusion, that he did not know what to do; his wishes urging him one way, while common sense impelled him in the contrary direction. At last a sort of compromise was made between the two.

Why not give to her he so much admired even the benefit of a doubt? His heart had already done so, and he soon brought his reason to submit. Why was he to believe so implicitly all that he had been told? It was but the word of one person against that of another. That was a comforting reflection. Then, again, he well knew the difference that exists between Englishmen and foreigners, in their ideas of discretion and nice points of honour. The revelation that had been made to him, had been, as he imagined, totally uncalled for. Might it not have been prompted by jealousy or the desire of vengeance? The ungovernable passions of the accuser, which were positively known to him; might they not exonerate the accused? All these thoughts,

and many others of the same nature, came crowding through the mind of Sir Edward, as if in support of his own hopes and desires. He was a man, however, of too upright a nature to act against his conscience; and, much as he longed to do so, he could not honestly say that he was convinced of the justice of his surmises.

On the one hand, the case of Leonora seemed tolerably clear—on the other, appearances were decidedly against her. The awful moment at which the revelation had been made to him by the Marchese—the letter, and the jewels—all went to confirm his statement; and the indifference with which these had been received by Leonora, and her total silence ever since upon the subject, rose up in judgment against her. If there was nothing to conceal, what could have been more natural, after the conversation they had had, than her confiding—to him at least—the subject of the letter, and the contents of the box which he had delivered to her. This concealment on the part of Leonora was one of

the shortsighted acts that over-cunning people are prone to commit, and went farther to impress Sir Edward with at least a strong suspicion of her guilt than any thing she could have done. With a nature generous and noble such as his, it is difficult to say to what extreme of self-sacrifice and devotion an opposite course of conduct might have led; but this want of confidence was sounnatural under the circumstances, and betokened so little honesty and openness of disposition, that it gave him courage to pause. The wily Leonora had somewhat over-acted her part.

CHAPTER V.

WHILE Sir Edward thus hesitated and reflected, his friend Lord Strathearn was rushing a willing victim into the toils that had been spread for him. These two men, though so closely allied in the bonds of friendship, were very different. The nature of Sir Edward seemed absolutely faultless, while that of Lord Strathearn was full of defects. They were not, it is true, of a very grave character; but still they often obscured his better qualities, for small faults creep out at many a loophole, while the great ones can lie concealed. Chief among these faults were jealousy and suspicion; and these had been, if not engendered, at least fostered by the education he had received. He was an orphan, and an only child. His high

rank, and enormous wealth, ought to have necessitated a more careful course of training than is generally bestowed upon persons of so independent a position; but, unfortunately for him, he had had no one near him in his childhood capable of engrafting upon his young mind true and sound religious principles, and a proper sense of the necessity of self-control.

Before he was five years old he had lost both his parents, and the guardianship of the young earl devolved upon an old gouty uncle, whose whole soul was devoted to money, and whose only idea of study was a daily contemplation of his banker's book. The usual course of education was bestowed by him on his young relation without much reflection; that is, the boy was sent to school and to college, and no very particular account exacted as to his studies or pursuits; but it was in the tender nursing of the large fortune committed to his care, that the warmth of his uncle's affection was made manifest. A long minority gave

him ample opportunity of exercising his fiscal talents; and, from the very embarrassed state in which he had received the property, he gradually drew it forth, and, by developing its vast resources, brought it, in course of time, to the colossal dimensions which, at the majority of the young Lord Strathearn, were a topic of universal conversation. His riches seemed absolutely fabulous; and, though his venerable uncle had never been able to imbue him with his own love of money and miser-like habits, he had contrived to instil into his mind other qualities and tenets, which were not likely to conduce much to his happiness or peace.

From the time that he could understand his own position, and its importance, Lord Strathearn had been taught to beware of and distrust the whole world. He was made suspicious instead of cautious; and, from being perpetually reminded of his wealth, and the object that it rendered him in the sight of all men, he acquired the habit of always thinking

about it, and identifying himself with it. He had less personal vanity than generally falls to the lot of man, and that without any affectation. He imagined himself not good-looking, and he really did not care the least whether he was so or not. His riches he thought were his charms, and all the attention he received, he attributed to the potency of their spell. Whoever approached him was, he imagined, attracted by the same golden lure, and he became jealous of every body, as though they were cruelly neglecting him and worshipping his other self.

The idea of being "taken in" haunted him like a shadow. He had been so constantly warned that such would be his fate, and it had been so assiduously proved to him that such had always been the fate of every rich man, that he was launched into the world with the impression, that the whole of society in general was more or less one vast congregation of swindlers. This idea was not very favourable

to the development of the many kindly and affectionate feelings that had long been stifling in his heart, under the overwhelming load of prejudice with which it was filled. His mind, however, was not of that contracted order that relies entirely upon others for its opinion of the world.

Lord Strathearn had not been long abandoned to his own guidance, ere he discovered that a part at least of all that he had been taught was a monstrous exaggeration, and a cruel perversion of some of the best feelings of human nature. A sensation of gladness pervaded his whole being as this discovery rushed upon him. It seemed as if the whole world had suddenly been reprieved; and he forthwith plunged headlong into the current of friendship for which his heart pined. This violent extreme soon brought its own remedy; and, as might be easily imagined, instances were not wanting to prove that the creed of his youth had not been so entirely void of good foundation. As soon as he had

suffered a little, he began to see more clearly. The world was therefore neither so bad as he had been taught, nor so perfect as he had dreamed, and a good deal of soberness of idea was the result of this decision to Lord Strathearn.

Enough, however, of the old leaven of his bad education remained, to give a decided tinge to a character and disposition otherwise full of frankness and affection. He became, or rather was still, a shy and cautious man, always on the look-out for the motives of every one who approached him, and taking very little upon trust. One of the few persons with whom he was upon terms of entire confidence, was Sir Edward Devereux. They had been friends from their childhood, and now were more like brothers. Lord Strathearn felt so completely "that he might trust" Sir Edward, that it took off all restraint in their affection. With him there could be no fear, for he had nothing to gain by his friendship. Sir Edward was very

nearly as rich as he was himself—was quite as well placed in the world, and in short must be a most disinterested friend. This was what Lord Strathearn cared most about; and he gave himself up to the pleasure of this certain affection with a fervour that showed how much he valued its sincerity. The two friends had constantly travelled together abroad, and the moment of Sir Edward's return to Atherston castle was gladly seized by Lord Strathearn; who willingly abandoned his gayer life in London, to come and enliven the solitude of the country, and soothe the saddened heart which he knew was writhing under the agony of recollections.

He had very little idea, upon making his appearance at the festive scene of Belinda White's party, of the surprise and delight that awaited him. If, however, the prejudices which had been so firmly implanted in the mind of Lord Strathearn had, by freer intercourse with the world, somewhat disap-

peared, it was only in regard to men. He certainly did not suspect them quite as much as formerly ; but with women it was exactly the reverse. He seemed to have transferred to them all the doubts and suspicion from which he had absolved his own sex. He was not a very sensible man ; but he possessed the very rare quality of being totally without vanity. He could not imagine that any woman would like him for himself, and to be loved for himself was the sweetest dream of his heart. He was in reality full of affectionate feeling, and would have adored, and devoted himself to, the woman who could have firmly convinced him that it was his heart, and not his rank and wealth, which she coveted. Of all the women he had ever seen, Leonora was the one whom he most admired. He had been struck by her beauty on seeing her in Italy, and his delight in meeting her again was perfectly genuine.

Since the first day, his admiration and affection had gone on gradually increasing ; and as,

combined with her surpassing beauty, she really possessed every talent and accomplishment that could be desired, he thought her, as she apparently was, the most perfect of human beings. To make her his wife was his firm determination: but he wished first to gain her affection—her true and undivided affection, such as he had dreamed. Above all he must possess her confidence; she must confide to him all—her every thought, as well as action; or he could never feel that her heart was his own.

Leonora, who possessed a tolerable degree of penetration, had not been slow in observing the quick jealousy and suspicious sensitiveness which formed so prominent a point in the character of her new admirer. She had, however, underrated the poignancy of these feelings. Like all very cunning people, she thought herself more clever than she really was; for she did not possess that insight into character which alone gives thorough power over others. To manage any person, or thing, one must first

clearly understand it, and this was exactly the point upon which she failed. She did not understand the nature of the man with whom she was playing so bold a game. She thought he was jealous, in a vulgar acceptation of the term—that he was jealous of people, while in reality he was jealous of things—of shades of thought and feeling, the nicety of which her mind, as it was not capable of appreciating, could not seize. This was a great, but a very common mistake.

CHAPTER VI.

THERE was very little variety in the life of the inhabitants of Whittington, although it was what is called "such a good neighbourhood." After the periodical visits, which all the ladies thought necessary to pay to each other, had been exchanged, there was not much to be done. But it was especially after any grand social effort, in the shape of a dinner or tea party, had been made, that it relapsed into a quietness so profound, that it seemed as if it never could wake again from it. This state of somnolency was peculiarly observable after the grand event of Belinda White's breakfast, an event without precedent in the annals of the Whittington festivities. As soon as the party had been sufficiently talked over, there

was nothing more to be said or done ; and every body appeared resigned to stay quietly in their own homes, until the next ebullition of popular gaiety should summon them forth.

Even the energies of Mrs. Percy Linklater seemed to have come to a stand-still ; for, after her prodigious success at the breakfast, she had not been able to advance a step farther. She had certainly received a civil bow from Lord Glanberris as he left the whist table that night ; but, as she had been standing behind his chair for more than an hour, he could not have avoided some acknowledgment of her presence. Since then, however, no one from Winton Park had made their appearance in Whittington, and Mrs. Percy Linklater, condemned to her "front parlour," and doubly suffocated with the smoke of cigars since Belinda White's present to her husband, had nothing to do but to sit in rueful meditation over two quires of paper she had bought ; the greater part of which she intended to fill with her usual sup-

plications, and despatch to the persecuted Lord Glanberris, in order to prove to him that the Mr. and Mrs. Percy Linklater, "who had the honour of claiming kindred with him," were still in existence. A whole day was generally occupied in concocting one of these epistles, as a copy was to be made, which she always kept by her, for fear of writing the same thing over again, next time, in exactly the same words. Even her patience began to be a little exhausted, as she looked back upon the endless sheets of paper she had wasted, and found herself still as far as ever from the goal of her desires. How in her heart did she rail against the flinty hardness of that "vile aristocracy," as she secretly denominated all those above her, cringing abjectly to them the whole time whenever chance favoured her with an opportunity!

She was sitting one morning, occupied as usual with her meditations, and in no very amiable mood as she contemplated her prospects of ultimate success, when her husband, whom she

had sent on several messages, came unexpectedly into the room. He had latterly grown quite unbearable. Ever since the generosity of Belinda White had placed him out of the reach of want as regarded his cigars, he had assumed an air of independence which was not only singularly unpleasant, but might actually entail serious consequences. Mrs. Percy Linklater absolutely seemed to have lost all control over him. He whistled and walked about with his hands in his pockets, and talked very loud, and did sundry other things that his double-refined wife declared "nothing but an ostler at an inn, or a German," would do. In short, he was extremely disagreeable, and, what was worse, unmanageable, and not worth the money that he cost to keep in existence; and Mrs. Percy Linklater longed more devoutly than ever that she could get him into "some place under government," that would keep him out of harm's way, and out of hers also. She had, however, her own reasons for not flying

out into a passion every time he chose to spit upon the carpet, or use language not fit for an alehouse, although he knew very well how to speak. And she thought with a sigh of all that money his adult education had cost her. But she smothered her feelings very prudently, and looked for better days. She was always looking forward; but, alas for poor Mrs. Percy! she had attained a ripe middle age, and was still gazing upon a dissolving view.

This morning, as Mr. Percy Linklater so unexpectedly bestowed his presence upon her, he at least did not seem much cast down. His jaunty air was quite exhilarating to behold. He came into the room with a light tripping step, very different from his usual dejected one, his hat on one side of his head, and of course a cigar in his mouth. The hand that had been indispensably occupied in opening doors, which he never thought of shutting, was instantly restored to his pocket, and flinging himself down upon the horsehair sofa, which

he covered with mud from his boots, he exclaimed—

“I say, Sally!”

“Sarah!” murmured Mrs. Percy in a dove-like voice, as with a studied air of gentleness she got up and shut the door, in order to prevent Betsy hearing every word that was said.

“Well, then, Sarah, since you are so particular—Lord love you, old girl! what does it signify? Sally, or Sarah, they seem to me just the same,” was the reply.

“Not at all, my dear Percy!” objected the lady in the most winning tone. “As I have often told you, ‘Sally’ is a common abbreviation, in use only among housemaids and kitchenmaids. It is not a lady’s name. Who ever heard of a ‘Lady Sally?’—now one knows plenty of ‘Lady Sarahs.’”

“And much good they do us—or themselves either, for that matter! Is there one of them that will ever be immortalized like ‘Sally in our Alley,’ or ‘Sally Lunn?’ Oh! dear delicious

Sally Lunn—exquisite Sally Lunn!—with just one cut across, and the butter streaming out at the edges. I say, Mrs. P., couldn't you let us have one for tea to-night? it only costs two-pence;" and, in his anxious enthusiasm, Mr. Percy Linklater took the cigar out of his mouth and laid it on the table beside him.

"Well, I don't see why we might not," condescendingly replied Mrs. Percy, to whom the perspective of a good "tea" after her frugal dinner was not uninviting; "that is, if the bread is not come in yet."

"And if it is, it is only a penny roll—but I can step round to the baker's and see about it," said the accommodating husband; and then he went on in an endearing tone, that by no means softened the rigidity of muscle his wife's face continued to preserve—"Come, don't look so glum, old girl! I'll promise to mind and say 'Sarah' whenever any of our fine friends are near. They're all very well; but we'll do without them yet, or my name's not Peter."

“Percy—for Heaven’s sake!” expostulated Mrs. Percy, with her cheeks turning purple; “you are so very incautious. I think,” she added in a whimpering tone, “considering my indefatigable exertions in your interest, and my affectionate desire to see you amalgamated with that high aristocratic society for which you are now so well fitted, you might regard with a little more complacency any peculiarity of refinement in my taste upon the subject of appellations.”

The countenance of Mr. Percy Linklater gradually fell as he listened to this speech. It did not at all convey sentiments in union with a little secret he had to tell, and the horizon appeared suddenly darkening before him, but he only said softly—“Now, there’s a dear, good Sarah! Don’t knock me down with reproaches, and say a string of long words as if you were reading a column out of a dictionary, and I’ll mind my P’s and Q’s, and call you any thing you like—but, bless my conscience,

what's that? La! if I haven't sat on my cigar;" and, as he jumped up in a hurry, the smell of burnt cloth attested the truth of his words. "I have it—oh! it's not much—only a singe!" he exclaimed, as, twisting the skirt of his coat in all directions, he at last discovered the unlucky spot.

"That all comes of that horrid habit of smoking," observed Mrs. Percy affectedly, and delighted to have an opportunity of saying a word against Belinda White's valued present.

"I am sure, Percy, I wish you would give it up, and make a present of your cigars to some poor person; that is all they are fit for."

"Well, I did give two away to-day. I changed two with Tim Sikes for a glass of ale he was going to swallow, just as I was coming by the 'White Hart.' I grudged the cigars, too; but I was so confoundedly thirsty, and I knew I should get nothing here but water."

"I hope, Percy, nobody saw you do such a

thing," suggested Mrs. Percy, suppressing her wrath with difficulty; for the White Hart Inn stood on a rising ground in the very centre of the village, and all that took place before the door could be very distinctly visible to the eyes of the curious."

"Not a soul!" he replied boldly. "How could they? Tim and I were sitting down in the tap. Old Turner was out, and, by good-luck, Tim had the key. Tim's a capital fellow! He'll never say a word."

"At the alehouse again," said Mrs. Percy, in a tone of disgust; as she buried her nose in her worked pocket handkerchief trimmed with imitation lace.

"Well, and where should a man go if he is parched with thirst, and can't get even a glass of beer in his own house?" asked Mr. Percy Linklater with asperity, and a look of detestation at his wife; who luckily did not see it, for she was still keeping off the imaginary smell of Tim and the alehouse with the three drops of

eau de Cologne she allowed herself every day at noon when she dressed. It was, however, by no means prudent to give vent to his feelings in words, and that Mr. Percy Linklater instantly perceived; and, to do away with the impression his last remark might have created, he resumed his tone of amiability, and went on.

“Now—don’t, Sarah, make such a fuss about nothing! Your poor little Peter wouldn’t vex you for the world; you know he wouldn’t! So, there’s a darling now—don’t be angry. I couldn’t help being thirsty, you know, and there was no one at home but Tim.”

“My dear love!” answered his gentle wife, taking her handkerchief from her face, “nothing is farther from my thoughts than being angry with *you*, for any thing you do. I only regret that sometimes the exuberance of your spirits and the innocent inclinations of your heart should lead you to unwise proceedings. There might, by some unfortunate possibility,

arise a concatenation of circumstances that could, by insidious distortion, be brought to bear an equivocal signification."

The long words had begun again. They never boded much good to poor Percy, so he only answered meekly—

"Oh, of course! You are quite right, Sarah. Bad can always be made out of good. Lies are very easily told."

"My dear love—there again—forgive me for finding fault with any thing *you* say; but the word 'lies' is rather too direct a manner of expression for refined society."

"Ha! ha! ha!" shouted Mr. Percy, quite forgetting his propriety; "as if none of your 'genteel people' know what the word 'lies' means. They never tell any themselves, I suppose—don't even know what it means! Ha! ha! ha!" and he laughed again with all his might, in spite of the frigid face of his wife, who with great dignity replied—

"All I can say is, that I never heard the

word used. 'Falsehoods,' or 'misrepresentations of facts,' would in my mind be a better mode of expressing one's meaning upon such a subject."

"And an equal misrepresentation of the fact," continued Mr. Percy Linklater, mimicking her governess-like manner; and then, seeing the cold dogged look she usually wore settling back upon her hard face, he once again relapsed into tenderness, and, ceasing his hilarity, said with a sigh—

"Well, well! I suppose you are right, Sarah. You know more about genteel people than I do. But I am very willing to be taught. You know all I have learned already; so don't snub me so, Sarah! Don't be hard upon me, my own love!"

"It is the last thing I should ever think of, my *dear* Percy; it is only for your good that I speak. You are so boisterous sometimes, and those rude words are so very vulgar. You know, my love," she added with great benign-

nity, "I only tell you so for your own sake—I am so very anxious about you."

"Thank you, my own darling!" answered the amiable husband, trying to conceal a wry face, and conscious that his beloved Sarah would require the greatest possible smoothing down ere she could be brought to listen to what he had to say—"I know it is all for the best, so you mustn't flare up if I let out one of my old words now and then. You know I never open my lips before any one, for fear of forgetting my manners. But, indeed," he continued with a yawn, "it is heavy work enough this genteel life. Oh, Sally, Sally! why can't we go back to the old days?"

"Because the old days can't come back to us. We must go on with the times. The generation we knew has passed away, and with it its manners and its ignorance. Progress and education are doing their work, and we must not be behind hand in the race."

The lofty manner in which Mrs. Percy de

livered these words, which were some few of the popular phrases she had learned by heart, did not in the least impose upon her husband; who, if he had little sense, had some feeling, and a lingering fondness for old scenes and kind friends long since gone by; and there was a slight tinge of sadness in his face and tone as he answered—

“Yes, Sarah dear! I know all that; I have heard it a thousand times—but I don’t believe it. The very people that are always talking of ‘progress and education,’ don’t know what they mean. It seems to me that they only put forward the saying as an excuse for neglecting their proper business. Tim Sikes and I had a few words on the matter to day, and he says he has never been able to get one single useful thing done in his house since his daughters took to their music and French. Not a stock-ing darned or a shirt washed the whole week! I don’t call that any improvement, for my part. I’m for every one minding their business in

their own sphere. That's my idea of people doing their duty."

"And my idea is, that it is only grovelling minds that have no desire to rise in the world!" replied Mrs. Percy, coldly.

"Then, I suppose, mine is very grovelling," meekly observed her husband, "as I certainly liked old friends and old ways much better than new. Oh, Sally! when I remember old days, it seems as if I was young again. There were people then who were glad to see me, and shook me by the hand, though I was but a poor tailor's apprentice. And you yourself, Sally, when I see you so stiffened up now, and remember your pretty face smiling at me through the window of your father's shop behind the rows of candles, of a morning as I went by to my work—oh, Sally, Sally! those were happy days, and many's the glass of half-and-half you gave me across the counter on the sly! I can see you now, Sally, with your rosy face smiling, as you

locked up the money in the till, and came out for a walk in the dusk. I was your own little Peter then, and you weren't ashamed of me or yourself either. And now, that we have worked and toiled from morning to night at our books, and gone through our education like two grown up children, what are we the better for it?"

"How can you ask, my dear Percy? Does not our education, and the refinement and development of our intellectual qualities, fit us to associate with the highest and greatest in the land?"

"And if they do not want to associate with us, Sally, how can we force them? If Betsy the cook was to learn all we have learned, and then, instead of cleaning the house, insisted upon being with you as your companion, how would you like it?"

"What nonsense, my dear Percy, you are talking! Who ever thought of Betsy being a fit companion for me?" replied Mrs.

Percy, drawing herself up with a highly offended air.

“And who ever thought of you or I being fit companions for earls and countesses—I who was a tailor, and you a tallow-chandler’s daughter—merely because we have educated ourselves? And you have learned to talk like your governess; while I, not being so perfect in my lesson, am always desired to ‘hold my tongue.’”

“It seems to me that you are bent on saying every thing that is disagreeable,” said Mrs. Percy, haughtily.

“No, indeed, my dear Sally! you quite mistake my meaning. I never know how to explain any thing; I cannot, somehow or other, put the words together, though I know them. I dare say you are quite right, but I was only just giving you a bit of my opinion; but I suppose that was wrong—only Tim happened to say the same thing. Tim says it’s a shame and a sin for a man to waste away

all his time, as I do ; and indeed—indeed, Sally—Sarah, I mean—I *am* growing confoundedly tired of my life here !” And Mr. Percy Linklater concluded his speech with a yawn, as he stretched out both his arms above his head.

CHAPTER VII.

Now it did not suit Mrs. Percy, for a variety of reasons, that her husband should grow tired of Whittington at present. His feeble attempts at insubordination had, however, lately given her unpleasant suspicions that such was beginning to be the case. A little relaxation of her iron rule might be, perhaps, advisable. It was this idea that had made her so lenient upon the subject of Tim and the glass of ale in the tap-room. Little, however, did she imagine to what an extent her generosity was about to be tried, or she never would have provoked the discussion she so much wished to avoid, by remarking in the biting tone she did—"I have no doubt of it. I always knew that good society was utterly distasteful to a man whose

early associations were of so very different a class."

"Pretty well, that, for a tallow-chandler's daughter," observed Mr. Percy Linklater, crossing his legs, and beginning to light another cigar. He had grown extravagant.

"Well! and if I was," replied Mrs. Percy, turning purple at this remark, "is it not the more to my credit that I have raised myself, by my education and manners, to be a fit companion for the highest ladies in the land?"

"Only they won't have you, Sally—more's the pity! But, I suppose, it comes from the same fault as mine, only turned topsy-turvy. My early associates were too bad, as you say; so I suppose theirs were too good—I can't make out the riddle any other way; for, after all, Sally, you are very nice, and quite a pretty woman when you have got your lilac gown on, only not quite so rosy as you looked among the candles; but," he added quickly, as if to make up for this incautious reminiscence, "it

is more genteel to be pale; I always observed that all great ladies have a sort of faded, washed-out look. I suppose it's the elegance of their minds, that can't stand the wear and tear of everyday life—just like my best silk handkerchief; there's no colour at all in it after six months' washing."

This passing allusion to the state of his scanty wardrobe might bring her upon dangerous ground; so Mrs. Percy hastened to double back a little way, and with her most sagacious look observed—

"Ah! it is very well for you, Percy, who never think seriously upon any subject for five minutes together, to laugh at great people and their ways; but what chance have we of getting on without them? Who is to advance us but some one greater than ourselves? Particularly," she added in a confidential tone, "if they think we in any way belong to them."

"Oh, Mrs. P., for shame!" cried Mr Percy, in a most familiarly amiable tone; for the sudden

softening of his wife's manner had filled him with hope and courage—"for shame, Mrs. P.! you, a disciple of the 'progress and people' faction, to advocate the cause of 'nepotism and favour!' Oh, Mrs. P., I blush for you! *Consistency* is the first quality of all men of independent mind. I have read that in the papers, so it must be true. Now it strikes me, that people that set up for independence and standing on their own merits, had better not sneak for patronage and protection quite so humbly."

"Sneak!" retorted Mrs. Percy, livid with rage; "what do you mean by sneaking for patronage and protection?"

"I mean this!" exclaimed Mr. Percy, hastily snatching from the table the rough copy of the last petition to Lord Glanberris, with every line of which he was familiar. "Here are your own words, Mrs. P.—here, in the fourth page—'All we have to depend upon is *your* favour and protection;' and here, in the

seventh page—"If you withhold your patronage, to whom can we look ?" And here, in the fifteenth—"My beloved Percy has no other hope than in your influence;" and here again, in the nineteenth—"Do not condemn us to utter ruin by withholding, if not your patronage, at least your recommendation," and so on to the end of the chapter;" and he tossed the paper back upon the table.

"A beautifully written and touching appeal!" observed Mrs. Percy with dignity, and smoothing down affectionately the leaves that had been so wantonly crumpled.

"I dare say it might seem so, if you always kept to the same story," replied her excited husband, who had his own reasons for this sudden outburst of eloquence; "but have not I heard you, day after day, hold forth about 'your rights,' and 'your education,' and 'the march of intellect,' and 'the equalization of classes,' and 'the lowering of the aristocracy of rank,' and 'the elevation of the aristocracy

of merit,' and 'the extinction of the distinctions of society,' and a hundred other cant phrases of the kind, until you were black in the face with fury? Why, even Belinda White told you not to put yourself in 'a passion, for it was neither aristocratic nor meritorious. Haven't I heard all this, and haven't a hundred other people heard it too? and then you go crawling under the first earl's feet that won't tread upon you, and whine to him for 'patronage and protection!' Oh, Mrs. P.! I am ashamed of you, and you'd better be ashamed of yourself in time! You can't blow hot and cold in the same breath; and, clever as you are at inventing stories and palming them off among your friends, there may be others cleverer than you, and as sure as you live you'll be found out, 'and then there will be an end of us both.'"

The astonishment of Mrs. Percy Linklater, at this unlooked-for audacity on the part of her usually subdued husband, was so great, that she never thought of interrupting his harangue.

She could not tell but that the one glass of ale, which he had pleaded guilty to having drank in the tap-room with Tim, had been followed by several others, which were the cause of this unwonted courage; and she sat for a few moments looking at him with a mingled expression of curiosity and dismay.

As to him, he was in a most happy frame of mind. He felt as if, by a tremendous leap, he had cleared a precipice, and now, that he was safe at the other side, he might take his ease. He stretched himself more comfortably on the sofa, and fixed his eyes quite calmly on the face of his wife; while, with one hand in his pocket, he drew forth repeatedly the edge of what seemed to be a letter, as if to assure himself of its safety, and then he immediately pushed it back again. Courageous as he was, however, he had not nerve to sit quietly in momentary expectation of the *avalanche* of coarse invective, and low detraction and abuse, which he knew would before long burst from

the lips of his wife; for, when Mrs. Percy was excited, her drawing-room manners vanished, so he thought it better to avert the coming storm by taking the initiative, and assuming a grievance. But, in order not to appear too dictatorial, he tried to moderate his tone, and he began again in a softened voice—"So you see, Sarah, my dear, that's the truth, and nothing but the truth! I don't mean to find any fault with you; no woman could have worked harder; but the fact is, our game won't do."

"It shall be played out, nevertheless!" answered the now recovered Mrs. Percy firmly, and tapping the carpet with her foot.

"But I tell you it won't do!—it can't do! It may break down any day, and it will. I only ask you, is it likely Lord Glanberris will try to get me any place in the government without making some inquiries about me? I am nearly fifty, and he or some one else will want to know what I have been doing all my life. People always give sureties, or something;

and I leave it to you to say whether, if they come to make inquiries about us, we shall be much the better for it?"

"I do not see," replied Mrs. Percy, in a somewhat subdued tone, "how any one is to find out down here any little thing that took place in the north, or in Ireland, or in any other remote corner. And, recollect," she added in a much lower tone, "we were not known in reality, since we did not give our own names."

"No more we do here, Mrs. P.; only this time we ventured on a grander christening than usual. I own I am sometimes rather curious to know what we shall be called next; but," added Mr. Percy hastily, as he saw the brows of his wife contracting, "that is only when I have nothing else to do or to think of; but I have been very busy lately."

"You!" exclaimed Mrs. Percy with an undisguised look of contempt.

"Yes—me!" replied her meek husband, putting on a caressing manner; "me—your

own poor little Peter—your useless little husband, who never could do any thing right in his life ! Well, Mrs. P., I have done something at last, and something very good, too.”

“ You ! ” again ejaculated Mrs. Percy ; but this time she avoided too much laconism, by adding the word “ impossible.”

“ Improbable, you should have said, Mrs. P., but not ‘ impossible ; ’ for ‘ determination overcomes all obstacles ; ’ that was one of the copies I used to write when I was hard at work at my second education. But, as I was saying before, Mrs. P., I *have* done great things. I have been some time about it ; but at last it is done. What do you think of my having secured an independence for life ? actually got a place for myself ! ”

“ Percy ! ” exclaimed his wife, in a suddenly improved tone. “ Is it possible ? How delighted I am ! I cannot believe it ! My dear love, I congratulate you ! There is an end of all our troubles ; ” and as, with glistening eyes,

she stretched out one hand to her husband, with the other she took up the roll of written paper from the table, and, looking at it fondly, she said—"I was sure of it, sooner or later. I knew that soft old earl could not stand out for ever against my letters. But, to be sure, I wrote my very best. It is not every one, I flatter myself, could write such letters. Dear me! when I think of all the paper that I have used, and the best satin, too!"

The countenance of Mr. Percy Linklater had been undergoing a most woeful change all the time his wife had been speaking, and consternation, instead of confidence, seemed gleaming from every feature, as he hurriedly stammered out—

"But Lord Glanberris has nothing at all to say to it! He knows nothing about it; it is quite another sort of place."


"Another sort of place!" echoed Mrs. Percy, "what do you mean?"

"Why, you see, Sarah," he answered very

civilly, "after all, I am sure official life would never suit me. I could not bear to be tied down to a desk all day; one might as well be a clerk in a counting-house. And you know what bad headaches I have. I could never bear such a shut up life. I want air, and light, and change of scene; the movement principle, in short;" and he laughed awkwardly, and pulled the paper he had so often looked at half out of his pocket.

"Well! well!" said his wife, impatiently.

"Well! you see, Sarah, as you say yourself, things are changing all over the world. I suppose it is the progressive effect of the movement cause, that I hear you talking about so much when you are at tea with the old ladies. Well, you see, every thing is so changed, it appears, here as well as elsewhere, that people can't go on as they used to do. You know, when we came here, there was no railroad beyond Monkfield, on the Thornton road, and had to go half a day's journey to get to



the main line. Now, you know, my dear Sarah, what an immense field for action—what immense opportunities for the development of talent, the exercise of intellect, and the promulgation of original ideas, the poor little railroads, with their two innocent lines of iron, have afforded. No one need pine for distinction or employment while the railroads are in their present state. There is plenty to be done by a man of talent;" and Mr. Percy Linklater, who had been for some time sitting erect upon his sofa, drew himself up with an air he intended to be very imposing.

"I see it all—I see it all, my dear Percy! I wish you joy. The railroad is the best—a director, or a chairman, or a manager, or something of that sort—plenty of money, and nothing to do but to talk; and, if any thing goes wrong, you can lay the blame on some one else. Oh, my dear Percy, you have managed well, I must say! Oh, I am so happy at last!" and with a sort of hysterical noise, between a laugh and

a cry, Mrs. Percy Linklater leaned back in her chair.

"But, my dear Sarah, you mistake ; it is not exactly on the railroad that my place is," replied her husband with an embarrassed air.

"Why, I thought you said"—began Mrs. Percy ; but she was speedily interrupted, and the voice of Mr. Percy Linklater seemed to have lost its buoyancy of tone as he continued—

"I merely said, or I meant to say, that there were many places connected with railroads that were very good."

"Connected !—I don't understand you, Percy."

"Why, you see, Sarah, as I told you before, or I meant to tell you, the branch railroad came no nearer to this, on the Thornton side, than Monkfield. Well, now there is another branch opened as far as Winterton, that brings the other great line within easy distance of this, only there is no mode of conveyance."

"Well!" exclaimed Mrs. Percy, looking very much puzzled.

"Well, Sarah, you know people must get to railroads—and how are they to go?"

"Any way they can—I suppose in a fly or a cab," was the reply.

"A fly or a cab! why, it is thirty miles if it is a yard from here to Winterton. No, Sarah, we are going to do things better than that; what do you think of a fine regular four-horse coach running twice a-day?"

"A very good thing, I dare say; but what has that to say to us, Percy?" asked the wondering lady.

"Two journeys a day—a guinea a week, besides all the perquisites—why, it's enormous!" was the reply.

"Percy, what *do* you mean?" inquired Mrs. Percy, in a very authoritative tone, although she was growing pale with the terror that had suddenly struck her to her heart.

"Why, I mean," cried Mr. Percy, with a

vehemence that gave the idea of his words being pushed out of him by force—"I mean that the coach is a first-rate speculation—sure to answer; and, as they wanted a first-rate whip, and I wanted to make my fortune, I have closed with Turner's offer to drive for him—and you know, Sally, that I *can* drive;" and, as he concluded his speech, Mr. Percy Linklater jumped up from his seat, gave his wife a familiar slap upon her shoulders, and put himself in a driving attitude, accompanied with a look which he intended to be exceedingly knowing.

"Drive—Coach—You!" ejaculated Mrs. Percy, with a gasp between each word, and then she added furiously—

"You drive! Did I hear right? You drive, Percy—you a stage-coachman!"

"No, my love, not a stage-coachman; there's no such thing now; we have progressed too far. I shall only be 'the gentleman that drives,'" answered Mr. Percy, trying by his

jocular tone to hide the great uneasiness he felt.

“Percy,” said his wife solemnly, “have you quite lost your senses?”

“No, Mrs. P., I should say not—at least not quite; for I have contrived to drive a capital bargain. That old Jew, Turner, wanted to put me off with only my wages—salary, I mean; but I wouldn’t stand that. I stuck out for the perquisites—a shilling a piece from every passenger at least. Won’t I touch my hat to them nicely! They’ll soon see they have got none of your common sort to drive them. Tim put me up to a thing or two. We’ve had many a talk over it in the tap—Tim and I. He’s a capital fellow, that Tim. I must find him some little job or other about the coach.”

“Percy, I again ask you, have you lost your senses? You surely don’t mean all the abominations you have been saying.” The voice of Mrs. Percy had lost somewhat of its firmness as she made this remark; for there was an

expression of great honesty in the delight manifested by her now radiant husband.

“Yes, but I do though—on the honour of a gentleman!” replied Mr. Percy, looking very grand; “don’t you see, Mrs. P., I couldn’t help myself. I had nothing to do; I haven’t clothes to my back—no dinner to eat; nor a soul to speak to, except people that turn up their noses at me. Flesh and blood couldn’t stand it longer; and I say, and Tim says so too, that trying to earn an honest livelihood is more like a real gentleman born and bred, than aping gentility, and setting up for what we are not, and never were, and never can be. I say, Mrs. P., that I am right, and for once I’ll stick to my own opinion. Tim says I’m not a man if I don’t,” and Mr. Percy Linklater put his hat upon his head, and gave it a hard knock on the very top, as he made one step towards the door. He was evidently going to report progress to Tim. Mrs. Percy perceived the imminence of the danger she was in; all her castles in the

air more than tottering, and a husband daring to assert his independence. The moment was critical, she rushed to the pathetic for support, and, beginning to cry, exclaimed—"Oh, Percy! my dear Percy! my own love! You to come to this! You; that I destined to the highest offices of the state—You——"

"That weren't fit for one of them," broke in Mr. Percy, who was growing quite courageous at the thought of Tim's unqualified approval of all he had done. "Take my word for it, Mrs. P., I shall do fifty times better on the box of 'the Moonbeam'—that's the name Tim and I chose, because the new coach is to run by night— isn't it good? we thought it might encourage the passengers; take off the idea of dark nights. Well, as I was saying, depend upon it, I shall do fifty times better on the box of 'the Moonbeam,' than ever I should upon the Treasury bench. So cheer up, old girl, and don't look so blue! Remember, you can take a trip up to town and back again for next to nothing

now;" and Mr. Percy Linklater began to button up his coat in a great hurry, as if he was just starting on his journey.

Mrs. Percy buried her face in her handkerchief. She was furious; she was distracted; but she was helpless. To gain time was her only hope, so she said plaintively—"And I, who had so much better things in view. Oh, Percy! why be in such a hurry? We could always come to that in the end. It is not quite settled, I hope and trust; is it, my love? Tell me it is not quite settled yet."

"Quite; there is the agreement—all properly signed. There, Sally, look at that! Your little Peter can be trusted, you see, after all. That is regular, I hope;" and he held up before her the paper he had been so long cherishing in his pocket.

"At all events, don't be in a hurry to begin," she entreated, as she pretended to read the agreement. "Wait till I have spoken to some one."

“Impossible, Mrs. P.! the coach can’t wait; the advertisements are out. Go, we must—good-bye,” and he moved towards the door. “Mind,” he said, coming back a few steps, “don’t go and talk about it yet. There were six other candidates for the place, and you’ll raise me up a host of enemies; wait till we’re off.”

“May I not just tell Belinda White?” asked Mrs. Percy, now miraculously softened. “I have my reasons.”

“Well, I don’t care for her knowing it, much. Belinda White’s a good creature: I’ll never ask her for a shilling, I promise her. But I must be off now: Tim’s waiting for me just round the corner. Good-bye.”

Mrs. Percy, with a sinking heart and streaming eyes, watched him as he went whistling down the street with both hands in his pockets, and then, drying her tears, she put on her best bonnet and shawl, and hurried away to consult Belinda White. There was still a hope.

CHAPTER VIII.

IN a very comfortable room in one of the best hotels in London, Mr. Stratford and his daughter were seated at breakfast. Contentment was beaming from the faces of both, but arising from far different causes. Mr. Stratford was in great spirits at having speedily finished the business which had been the cause of his journey, and now counted the moments until he could get back to The Cliffs; and Leonora was rejoicing over the success of her scheme: for of course she had not come to London without a design.

It was not difficult to impose upon a man like Mr. Stratford, who never asked a question or minded any body's business except his own; but it was painful to see the cold indifference with which his daughter made

use of this kindness and simplicity of heart, for her own purposes. She knew that he would follow where she led—blindly and implicitly follow—rather than give her a moment's uneasiness, or cause her the slightest disappointment; and she did not scruple to lead him exactly as it suited her, though it were even to his own dishonour. Such conduct never caused her an instant's remorse. No one could have imagined, as on that morning she sat at breakfast by the side of her father, that she had a single thought which she might have wished to hide. Her clear open brow was radiant, and the smile that curled her beautiful coral lip spoke both of pleasure and of pride.

Mr. Stratford watched her with delight. She was reading a letter which had just arrived, and every now and then a half-childish exclamation of joy showed how agreeable were its contents. At last she laid it down, and replying to her father's look, for he was too intent upon admiring her to have thought of speaking, she

said—"It is from Alice, papa—and full of news."

"News!" replied Mr. Stratford; "why, we have only been two days away from Whittington. What great event can have happened then?"

"Nothing there, papa," replied his daughter, with a smile. "You are always thinking of your dear Whittington: I am sure you think it an age since we were there."

"No, my love, I am not quite so homesick as that. I know we have only been here two days—but two days at my age is something; and I certainly do love The Cliffs. I never was so happy any where as I have been there."

"Well, we are going back directly, dear papa: as soon as ever you like: this evening by the last train, if you choose. Only I must first tell you all my gossip, for I am overwhelmed with news."

"Well, my darling, I am quite ready to listen—so you may begin," replied the good-natured man, who took an interest in any thing

and every thing that seemed to please his daughter.

"I will begin with Alice's letter, then; for the grand event is to take place at Winton, and not at Whittington. What do you think of Lady Glanberris being about to give a ball? Only fancy a ball at Winton in those beautiful rooms! It will turn the heads of every one in the country. So much gaiety never was heard of before: people had not half recovered Belinda White's breakfast."

"I dare say the ball will be very fine," observed Mr. Stratford, not looking quite so delighted as he had done a moment previously; "and when is it to be?"

"Directly, papa: on the twenty-fourth of this month. You know it is Alice's birth-day. She will be seventeen, and this ball is to celebrate the event."

"And is that all, my child?" asked Mr. Stratford, with a little air of disappointment.

"No, papa! not nearly all," replied Leonora,

taking up the letter; "of course the most important part comes the last. Alice wants me to decide for her, whether the ball shall be a fancy ball or not."

"I should say, certainly not," observed Mr. Stratford in a decided tone. "A fancy ball in England is always a failure."

"I think so too, papa! Alice seems anxious for it, because she has never seen one; but, for my part, I think it would be more pain than pleasure. I never could find any amusement in seeing people make themselves ridiculous."

"You have too good taste, and too good a heart, my angel," said her father, affectionately.

"Only think of Mrs. Blakemore, and Mrs. Bedingfield, and the Percy Linklaters in fancy dresses!" observed Leonora with a smile any thing but angelic; and then she added—

"But that is not all, papa—Alice wants me to choose her dress for the ball."

"That is a serious matter," said Mr. Stratford,

laughing. "I foresee I shall not get back to The Cliffs to day."

"You shall indeed, dear papa," replied Leonora, soothingly. She had from the first intended returning on the evening of that day. "You shall certainly get back to your dear Cliffs by tea-time. As to Alice's commissions, I know exactly where to get every thing she wants. I saw some beautiful dresses yesterday, one of which will suit her exactly; and I think I shall treat myself to one something like it. I mean to be very splendid at the ball, I assure you."


"Splendid, my darling!" exclaimed her father sadly. "Oh! if I only had the means, you should revel in splendour. As it is, we can only be comfortable, and independent. And you, my child, must always be beautiful and enchanting; so, leave splendour to others, and enjoy your youth and beauty while you can."

"And so you would like to see me splendid

if you could, dear papa," said Leonora playfully; and, taking his long withered hand in hers, she fondly stroked it down with her beautiful taper fingers, which, he had not before observed, were sparkling with gems. In another moment she turned to him, and said in a tone of triumph she could not conceal—

"Well then, papa, your wish will be gratified. I shall no longer be obliged to dress like a *grisette* or a charity girl; for, at least as far as jewels go, I shall have splendid ones—finer than any Lady Glanberris has got." And forthwith she recounted to her astonished father the whole tale she had so long since concocted about Madame Satriani and the legacy, which she pretended to have only received since her arrival in London.

Mr. Stratford actually gasped for breath as he listened to her words. He never thought of questioning their veracity; for—as he believed—Leonora had never in her life deceived him upon any one point. When she had finished



speaking, he actually burst into tears, and sobbed like a child.

“Thank God! thank God!” he exclaimed; “my child is safe! My Leonora—my angel! I shall not leave you penniless, as I feared. I may go out of the world in peace: I shall know that my darling is above want. Heavenly Father! how grateful—how humbly grateful—I am!” and he lifted his eyes and hands meekly to heaven, while the large tears rolled quickly down his cheeks. Leonora looked at him and smiled. Not even the saintlike image of the good old man returning thanks, in the fervour of his gratitude, for the blessing which he conceived had fallen upon him and his child, could move her to repentance or remorse. She gloried in the success of her artful scheme, and hastened to conclude as she had begun—

“Dear, dear papa!” she said, “you cannot be more thankful than I am. I knew you would be delighted with the news; but I would not tell you until the jewels had arrived,

though I got the letter two days before we came here, telling me where to find them."

"And will you not show it to me, dearest?"

"Willingly, papa; but unfortunately, in my hurry, I find I have left it at home," was the reply of Leonora.

"Poor Madame Satriani!" continued Mr. Stratford, frankly accepting the excuse, "I had the greatest friendship for her; but, God knows, not from any mercenary view. I did not even know that she possessed jewels such as you describe, though she certainly lived handsomely. I remember her palace was very fine."

"Oh! she was immensely rich," hastily observed Leonora; "but it was very generous of her to leave me so much. She might have divided the jewels; but then, to be sure, she had no relations very near that she cared about. But, papa, we can talk of all this another time; for now, indeed, we have not a moment to lose if we are to go home to-night. I must go

and see about Alice's commissions, also, but I shall be back very soon. While I am getting ready, I wish you would write just two notes for me—one to Lady Glanberris, and the other to Belinda White, and tell them the news."

"And why not write yourself, my child? You will describe every thing so much better than I can."

"Oh! it would seem so boastful; so much as if I wanted to show off my riches, if I wrote myself. It will come much better from you; and look," she added, with an arch smile, "as if you took a paternal interest in my fortunes. Besides, dear papa, I really have not time; and, as I know I shall not be able to go near Belinda or Lady Glanberris for several days, they would be excessively affronted if they happened to hear of my legacy from any one but ourselves."

"You are right, my love, as you always are!" said Mr. Stratford, getting up and going to-

wards the writing-table; and Leonora, as she rose also, gaily exclaimed—

“Of course, papa; could you doubt that? But make haste, and write the notes for me, and I will give you a glimpse of my finery before I go out.”

So saying, she left the room, and in a little while returned, carrying the identical jewel-case which had been delivered to her by Sir Edward; and from which, during her two days' stay in town, she had contrived to have the arms and ciphers it originally bore carefully effaced. The astonishment, as well as the delight, of Mr. Stratford, were unbounded. The jewels were really magnificent, both as regarded the quality of the stones and the exquisite beauty of the workmanship.

“Which do you like best amongst all these?” she said gaily, as with infantine delight she tried on endless ornaments, and as speedily replaced them with others.

“Me, my love! how can you ask me? You

know I am no judge of ladies' dress. I never could understand it, or its component parts. It seems to me the most intricate and the most mysterious science in the world," was the truly Britannic reply.

"That is the very reason I ask you, papa. As you cannot be prejudiced by your knowledge of fashions, when you admire any thing it must be for its own intrinsic merit: that is just what makes your opinion valuable. If I was an author, I think I should do exactly the same about my books—prefer the judgment of those who did not pretend to be learned on the subject; they would be sure to see things in a new light. But you have not told me, papa: you positively must give me some opinion, for you have excellent taste."

"Well, what am I to say?" asked Mr. Stratford good-humouredly, but with rather a puzzled look, as his eye wandered over the confused heap of jewellery before him.

"I will tell you in the easiest words," replied

Leonora, laughing ; “ if you were only to have one thing out of all these, which would you choose? ”

“ I think, if I was reduced to that sad state of poverty, I should decide upon this,” replied her father, taking up, as he spoke, a large oval brooch of unequalled beauty. It certainly did do honour to his taste, for the ornament seemed to be *unique*. The centre was composed of an immense oblong ruby, with a figure of the Madonna carved in relief upon it; this was surrounded by diamonds of great size and lustre, and surmounted by a crown, while from beneath hung some magnificent pearls.

“ This is positively not like any thing I ever saw before,” observed Mr. Stratford, as, having carefully examined the jewel he had chosen, he held it up against the black silk of his daughter’s dress; “ the scroll-work is the most beautifully designed thing I ever saw. It is evidently very old, and, I should say, very valuable.”

"It is beautiful, certainly: I thought you would not pass it over. I never saw a ruby so exquisitely carved. See, here are some cut in the usual way; they look quite common by its side, do they not, papa?"

"Quite!—Well I am glad I was right for once; for really it was a great undertaking to pronounce sentence all in a moment. Let me see the jewel of my choice once more, my child, and he held out his hands towards her."

Leonora unclasped the brooch from the front of her dress, where she had placed it in order to try the effect, and gave it to him.

Mr. Stratford went on, as he put on his spectacles—"Yes, it certainly is matchless! The crown is a royal one. It must have been some very old family gem. My dear child, you must always wear this when you want to look particularly well. It has a classical, antique style, which strikes me as very uncommon."

"I shall always like it the best of any, since


it is the one you admire so much, dearest papa," said Leonora, affectionately, as she bent down and kissed her father's cheek; "but now let me go, or indeed I shall be too much hurried. I will put in my notes as I pass the first post-office, and be back again in an hour or two."

And Leonora, gathering up her jewels, carried them off to her room, and then, getting into the carriage which was waiting for her, departed on her way, light-hearted and joyous as a child that has just triumphantly concluded his task, and received the most unqualified approval; while Mr. Stratford remained, too much overcome by happiness, to give a thought to any thing else that day. Even his return to The Cliffs scarcely occupied his mind, much as he had longed for it not two hours previously. A load of care, of which he seemed only now to know the weight, had suddenly been lifted from his heart, and the revulsion of feeling was overpowering. In spite of his calmness

and philosophy, Mr. Stratford had always looked with terror upon the prospect of his daughter's destitution in the event of his death. It was utterly impossible for him to make any adequate provision for her. He was old and feeble, and the thought had haunted him day and night. Now at least she was safe from all pecuniary cares, and in his pious heart the trusting and affectionate father looked upon her good fortune as a mark of the special care of Providence, and the reward of the many virtues of Leonora. And again and again he lifted his clasped hands and streaming eyes to heaven, and thanked God for having given him so loving and so excellent a child.

CHAPTER IX.


It was not often that Belinda White treated herself to a "fly:" this was an act of extravagance that only occurred now and then, on some great occasion; for, on small ones, the pattens and umbrella did the duty of a carriage, pretty nearly as well as Mr. Turner's yellow fly, that turned into a barouche in the summer, and consequently let the rain in all the winter in every possible direction. It so happened, however, that there was no rain at all one particular day, when, to the surprise of many of the inhabitants of Whittington, the yellow fly came rattling along the street at a very early hour in the morning, and the portly figure of Belinda White was discerned safely ensconced within it. Where could she be going? Nobody



could answer, because nobody knew; for Belinda White never told when she was going to do a kind act, or when she had done one. These were the only secrets that she had: upon any other subject the town-crier's revelations were more mysterious than hers; but it was with no evil intent, and proceeded chiefly from an amiable desire to gratify the multitude of people who were eternally asking her for "news." This day evidently she had not given any intimation of her proposed journey. She had only returned to Whittington two days before; and, therefore, it did not seem right or proper that she should start off again in such a hurry without saying a word to any one. Even Tim himself, who was driving, had not the least idea where he was going to, until, at the end of the street, Belinda White put her head out of the side window, and called out, "to Atherston Castle," and then Tim roused up his old white horse into its grandest action; for Tim liked going to great houses,

where there was always, at least, a chance of some ale. And so the old fly rattled and jerked, and the dust came in in clouds; for the windows, once opened, could not be shut again, and Belinda wished herself upon her feet, with her pattens and umbrella, fifty times at least, before the old white horse stood panting and smoking before the great gate of Atherston Castle. He had, still, however, a long way to go; for the lodge was nearly a mile from the house, and the road was uphill the whole way; so, in spite of the most vigorous persuasions from Tim, he chose to finish his journey in a walk.

Luckily, Belinda was in no violent hurry. She only wanted to be in time to catch Sir Edward Devereux at home, which she concluded would be the case if she arrived at a rational hour. The drive through the park also, was so beautiful that she could not wish it shortened; and tears came into the eyes of the kind-hearted woman, as she thought of the splendid position and formerly joyous life of the young owner



of this princely possession, and contrasted it with his present bowed down and blighted state. It was true that he neither complained nor alluded to his misfortune; but she, who had known him from a child, was the more and more impressed with the idea, that he would never recover from the blow he had received. Physically and morally, she looked upon his case as hopeless; for, as she never could have shut herself up and become a regular recluse while a shadow of life and hope remained, she could not understand how any one else could do so.

It was with infinite pleasure that, upon arriving at the house, Belinda found that none of its inmates had yet left it; for she would have been grieved if she had missed her opportunity of doing good, and also rather sorry to have wasted her fifteen shillings on a useless drive. And so she descended from her fly with alacrity, and shaking out her voluminous brown silk gown, sailed across the great hall,

and was soon ushered into the library, where she found Sir Edward Devereux writing at a table covered with papers, Lord Strathearn seated at another busily employed in tying flies for fishing, and Mr. Devereux stretched upon the sofa unpacking a case of delicate-looking French gloves, which apparently had just arrived. The three gentlemen uttered three several exclamations of delight as Belinda appeared, and she had no reason to complain of being coldly received.

"This is, indeed, most kind of you, my dear Belinda," said Sir Edward, again taking her hand and leading her to a seat, "and much more than I deserve. I ought long since to have gone to see you; but I have been ill and out of sorts, and not fit company for any one. But you forgive me; I know you do, Belinda, or you would not be here."

"To be sure I do, my dear!" she said gaily. "You did not think, I hope, that an old woman like myself was going to stand upon cere-

mony with an idle boy like you; and Master Stuart there, who used to sit upon my knee, what has he to say for himself? Have you, too, been ill and out of sorts, Stuart?" she asked, looking slyly at the great fat pink cheeks and dimpled hands of Mr. Devereux, who had returned to his work among the recesses of his glove box as soon as Belinda had sat down.

"Not he!" interposed Lord Strathearn; "but he holds a levee here every morning, of shoemakers, tailors, and every other artist he can get hold of. I expect, after another month's training, we shall be the most beautifully dressed pair in the world, though Edward and I have given him terrible trouble with our thick shoes and shooting-jackets."

"Don't mind Strathearn, Belinda, he is always quizzing any body who has a tolerable taste in dress. For my part, I do not see any merit in being clothed in alpaca, and tearing the carpets to pieces with hobnailed shoes. But," he added consequentially, "do not imagine

that I have neglected you. I hope I am rather too well bred for that. I have been twice to see you within the last week, but was told you were from home."

"It was true! I went to see the Marklands, and only came back on Friday; and I am going away again in a day or two to Winton Park, to stay till after the ball. You will all be there, of course."

"Stuart will, at all events," said Lord Strathearn, laughing, "shirt-front and all! It would be a thousand pities if all the country did not see such a sight. Have you seen his new Paris shirts, Miss White?"

"No—not I—what are they like?" was the reply.

"Only a little bit of work down the middle," said Mr. Devereux, trying to look very indifferent.

"Only a little bit of work that costs five-and-twenty guineas!" exclaimed Lord Strathearn, delighted to have found some one to listen to

him. "Now, Miss White, can you believe that? Here is poor Stuart always complaining of his poverty, and yet he gives five-and-twenty guineas a piece for his shirts! Can you explain that anomaly?"

"I am afraid one part of the story explains the other," said Belinda good-naturedly, and looking at the great baby face of the delinquent, who, divided between pomposity and vexation, pretended to be very busy trying on his gloves.

"Well, for my part," said Sir Edward, with the kind desire to protect his brother from Lord Strathearn's indefatigable raillery, "I hate all finery; but if a man does choose to wear a thing like a spider's web upon his breast, I don't see any positive harm in it. However, Belinda, you have not come all this way merely to talk of Stuart's shirt-fronts. Tell us all that has been going on at Whittington. Is there no news in your populous neighbourhood?"


“A great deal, my dear Edward. First, there is the news of the ball, and all the preparations for it—but that cannot interest you much. Then there is Miss Stratford’s legacy; that, I think, must interest every one who knows her.”

“Legacy!” echoed Sir Edward. “I did not know that they had lost any relation.”

“Nor have they; so the legacy is not accompanied with any of the saddening recollections that usually attend upon one. Miss Stratford has inherited from a friend—an old lady in no way connected with her,” and forthwith Belinda White recounted the whole history of Madame Satriani and the jewels, exactly as it had been intended that she should do. She was so intent upon her narrative, and so delighted to have so long a story to tell, that she never thought of looking at her audience to observe the effect of her words. She was sitting ensconced in a deep arm-chair near the writing-table, and Sir Edward occupied another by her side, but

a little farther back; she therefore could not see his face except by nearly turning round. Fortunately for him, the other two gentlemen were too much occupied with their own thoughts to attend to him; his emotion therefore passed unheeded; but, as Belinda pursued her story, every feeling that agitated his breast might have been traced upon his face. Sorrow, indignation, and contempt, seemed alternately struggling for the mastery; but at last they all faded away, and nothing remained but an increase of the death-like pallor that his cheek now too constantly wore.

He said nothing upon the subject of Belinda's communication, but a few words of the most ordinary import; while the other gentlemen were diffuse in their questions and remarks, and exhibited a very lively degree of interest in the subject. Poor Belinda! whose real object was to bring about a marriage between Leonora and Mr. Devereux, was enchanted at the good news she had to tell, and



the delight with which it evidently was hailed by him.

“Is Mr. Stratford come back yet, do you know, Miss White?” asked Lord Strathearn, in as careless a voice as he could assume ; but he had been tying his flies all wrong ever since Leonora’s name had been mentioned.

“Yes, they came home the night before last ; but I have not had time to go and see these famous jewels yet. I will try and do so to-morrow. It was Mr. Stratford who wrote me word of it from London : it appears they just arrived when he was there. The poor old man seems quite bewildered with joy. I am not surprised at it.” A sudden movement on the part of Sir Edward made Belinda pause in her speech, but he only said quietly—

“I believe Miss Stratford had no fortune before?”

“None whatever,” replied Belinda, “except any little savings her father might have been able to make for her. But now she is an

heiress, or rather a rich lady at once; for Mr. Stratford tells me the jewels cannot be worth less than a hundred thousand pounds, and may be much more valuable. Of course, she will sell most of them. It would be a pity to lock up such a sum for ever, when she and her father are so poor."

"It would be painful, too, to part with any remembrance of so kind a friend," observed Lord Strathearn, feelingly.

"That is all very well for you, a rich man, to say, but I own I think quite the contrary," said Mr. Devereux, who, having finished his studies upon gloves, had got up, and was looking out of the window. "It seems to me," he added, turning half round as he spoke, "that if a person leaves one any thing, it is with the intention of doing one good. What good does it do a man to see his wife walking about all covered from head to foot with diamonds? A few are very well; but for my part I think a woman loaded with them is a perfect absurdity."

"I advise you not to divulge your ideas on that subject so openly, at least till after you are married," observed Lord Strathearn laughing, "or you may happen never to find a wife. Half the women in the world marry to have diamonds: at least so I have been told. Is it true Miss White, or not?"

"I own I have heard our sex accused of it," smilingly answered Belinda.

"I shall take care no one ever marries me for diamonds!" muttered Stuart Devereux to himself, as he left the room unobserved by his companions.

"At all events," continued Belinda with animation, "our beautiful Leonora runs no danger of incurring such a suspicion now."

A cloud seemed to clear away from the brow of Lord Strathearn at this remark. Sir Edward was leaning his head upon his hand, and apparently in deep meditation, so he did not hear it, and Belinda went on.

"It will be quite the other way now, I sup-

pose; people will be making up to her for her fortune. Well, it was lucky poor Mr. Selwin didn't know of it, or he never would have had courage to propose to her."

"What—Mr. Selwin, the clergyman? Did he propose to marry Miss Stratford? I could scarcely have imagined it," observed Sir Edward suddenly, and with a slight degree of asperity.

"It is quite true, Edward," answered Belinda, "however unsuitable and improbable it may appear; but he spoke to me himself, as he said he was too shy to talk of such matters to a young lady."

"And she said——" suggested Sir Edward.

"That she would never marry a clergyman," was the reply.

"Did she say a 'clergyman,' or 'any one?'" inquired Sir Edward, with an air of agitation, that instantly filled the active brain of Belinda with a suspicion she had not hitherto entertained. She summoned what very little discretion she could command to her aid, and replied—

"No—a clergyman! She said she was not fitted to be a clergyman's wife, and then that Mr. Selwin was too old."

"How not fitted?" asked Sir Edward, with the same appearance of anxiety.

"Oh! that a country life would not suit her, and that she did not like charity children and Sunday schools year after year. I am sure, however, she is mistaken there; for I never saw any one teach better, or more patiently, than she does. Her class is near mine in the school, and I can hear all she says. However, I quite agree with her, that she is much too handsome to be shut up in the country for ever—don't you, Lord Strathearn?"

Lord Strathearn, who had been industriously sorting the contents of his fishing-book all the time Belinda had been speaking, actually started when thus directly appealed to, and, without looking up, merely answered hurriedly—

"Miss Stratford is very beautiful, certainly!"

and Belinda, seeing that the conversation of her companions was becoming very stupid, turned to another subject, which was in reality the cause of her visit.

“My dear Edward,” she said, “I want you to do me a kindness. I am sure I am not wrong in calculating upon you to aid me in helping a friend.”

“You may depend upon me, Belinda; any thing I can do, I will,” was the affectionate reply.

“Thank you, my dear!” said Belinda, kindly pressing the hand he had held out to her as he spoke. “I know you are as charitable as an angel. What I want is some help of a very substantial nature for a little woman, or rather for her husband, who is in great distress.”

“Mrs. Percy Linklater, is it not?” asked Sir Edward smiling, and his eye wandering towards the writing-table, where half a quire of paper closely written was lying, with the ominous bit of blue ribbon connecting the

sheets at the corner. There was no mistaking one of Mrs. Percy Linklater's epistles. Belinda, however, did not observe the glance that Sir Edward involuntarily directed towards it, and continued—

“It is exactly Mrs. Percy Linklater that I mean. She seems a very respectable, good sort of little woman, and I should be glad to do her a good turn. She tells me, they are so poor that her husband will be forced to accept a degrading occupation if something is not done for him.”

“But what can he do for himself? If I knew a little it would be a guide for me,” said Sir Edward.

“Any thing and every thing, I believe! At least so his wife says. Poor little woman, she seems devoted to him: she tells me he is a most highly educated man. I believe they are nearly related to the Glanberris' family.”

“Are you sure of that, Miss White?” inquired Lord Strathearn, who himself would

have been glad to help any one about whom Belinda White was anxious, but could not get rid of his usual suspicions.

“No! I know nothing positively about it; only Mrs. Percy says so, and also that her husband is extraordinarily clever. If so, it seems a pity he should, as she declares he must, throw himself and his talents away upon some degrading occupation.”

“Oh! he is a universal genius, I suppose; I have not much faith in such characters. And what does he aspire to?”

“Any little place under government that could be got for him,” said Belinda, innocently repeating the lesson she had been taught.

“That I shall assuredly not ask for, for a person of whose character and abilities I know nothing,” answered Sir Edward; “but I have no objection to take the risk myself, to please you, Belinda. I shall have an agency over a small property vacant very soon, that I could give him. There is a comfortable house that

he might occupy, not far from this. Do you think this would be of any use, until we find something better ? ”

“ The very greatest, I should say,” replied the kind-hearted Belinda, while the tears started from her eyes. “ God bless you, Edward ! You are always doing good to every one.”

“ It is the only pleasure I have left,” he replied with a sigh ; and then, as if not wishing to speak of himself, quickly added, “ will you propose this to your friends, and tell Mr. Percy Linklater to call upon me any day next week.”

“ I will, indeed, my dear Edward, and may Heaven bless you, and reward you ! ” she answered as she rose from her chair, and with a kind, motherly sort of manner, laid her hand upon his shoulder.

“ I wish I could see you looking better, my poor dear child ! ” she said in a low voice. Sir Edward lifted his fine eyes to the anxious face hanging over him, but with an expression of grief, heart-rending to behold. For another

moment, however, he had overcome the anguish he felt, and assuming an air of gaiety exclaimed, "I am better—almost well, my dear Belinda! You will see how well I shall be at the ball on Monday. I mean to dance all night. Be sure to tell Lady Alice so, as you are going to Winton."

"I will!" replied Belinda as she suppressed the sigh that rose to her lips, and, taking her leave, she hurried back to her fly, and went home full of gratitude to heaven for having enabled her to do a suffering fellow-creature a service.

CHAPTER X.

THE sudden change in the position of Leonora, from that of a penniless girl to one possessed of considerable wealth, seemed likely to effect a very immediate alteration in the conduct of all her admirers. Lord Strathearn, who had good reason to know that his attentions were very warmly received, had no sooner heard the welcome news than he felt as if his heart had been lightened of a heavy load. His suspicious mind was for a moment at rest, at least upon one point. If he was accepted—a matter of which he did not doubt—it would certainly not be from any mercenary view, and once again he indulged in his favourite dream of being “loved only for himself.” Scarcely had the important intelligence passed the lips of Belinda White, than he had made up his

mind what to do, and he felt almost ashamed at having so long hesitated, when he knew how ardently he desired to make Leonora his wife.

So sincere and so sensitive was the passion which he had conceived for her, that he guarded his secret with a vigilance that seemed more like jealousy than love. Not even to Sir Edward, from whom he seldom concealed a thought, had he breathed a word upon the subject; and, although his friend might have some suspicion of the admiration that filled his heart, he was far from suspecting the depth of feeling to which it had led. Perhaps the very well-founded impression of his own attentions having been equally well received, whenever he had chosen to offer them, prevented the mind of Sir Edward from enjoying its usual state of lucidity where Leonora was concerned. The two or three days which the absence of Mr. Stratford from The Cliffs had consumed, had materially altered the state of feeling in which Lord Strathearn seemed lately to have in-

dulged. Instead of being fretful and suspicious, he had grown impatient and determined. The absence of Leonora had shown him how dear her presence had become. That absence, so cunningly devised, had thus answered more ends than one; and Lord Strathearn, not much accustomed to put any restraint upon his inclinations, actually longed for some event or explanation that would put an end to the wearying state of irritation his own uncertainty entailed upon him.

The revelation of Belinda White seemed as if sent in answer to his anxious desire, and it, in a great measure, reconciled him to himself; for he could not shut his eyes to the fact, that he was about to commit, at least, a great imprudence in thus hastily determining upon marrying a woman, of whom in reality he knew nothing, except that she was very beautiful, and her manners were as charming as her face. He would have given a great deal to know more, but he would not

give his time; for he was one of those persons who are always in a hurry, and yet seemed never to do any thing very profitable with the hours of which they are so niggard. He was not, however, completely at ease, even at this moment, when all appeared so favourable to his desires. A nervous feeling of being about to be "taken in," seemed to fall upon his happiness like a blight; but he tried to shake it off, and persuade himself that he had no reason for it.

This feeling of distrust had become so habitual to Lord Strathearn, that he scarcely could struggle against it; and even at this instant, when his elation of spirits might, a little, have overpowered his reason, he was not free from the galling sensation of not being able "thoroughly to trust" the person in whom all his hopes and wishes centred. As soon as Belinda White had quitted Atherston Castle, Lord Strathearn had sought repose for his agitated feelings in utter solitude. He would not even re-enter the house with Sir Edward, but

stood upon the steps watching the yellow fly as it jingled down the road, until it had quite disappeared, and then he turned away and indulged in a long and solitary walk.

It was towards evening when he ordered his horses, and cantered over to The Cliffs. His mind was in a state of excitement which he could not explain. He knew that he did not intend to say any thing very particular to Leonora that day; but he wanted to see her—to study once more her every word and movement; to convince himself, again and again, that he was not wrong—that she loved him for his own sake, and that he might put the most implicit confidence in her. In spite of all this absolute determination to find her the perfect being he wished to think her, there were slight misgivings in the mind of Lord Strathearn as to her sincerity that he could not entirely surmount. Trifling circumstances—too trifling perhaps to note—had sometimes occurred, that gave him the idea that she did not always

simply "speak the truth;" and now, that the very words which were to decide his fate seemed trembling on his lips, these trivial recollections rushed back with an increase of force that was any thing but agreeable. Candour in the woman that he loved, seemed to him the first quality necessary to ensure his affection and respect. He might have forgiven other faults, but never her duplicity.

‡ The result of all these reflections was however, upon the whole, not unfavourable to Leonora's chance of becoming Countess of Strathearn; for Lord Strathearn was too much in love to judge as hardly of every word and action as he might have done had his own wishes been less interested in the matter. All that he could therefore obtain from himself on the score of prudence, was, a sort of compromise between his head and his heart, or rather his fancy; and a determination that he would not commit himself until he could conscientiously say, that any slight suspicions he might have had were

perfectly obliterated. This was a very wise resolve; and doubtless, had Leonora been acquainted with it, she could have so shaped her course as to have avoided the many dangerous shoals with which the sea of suspicion is studded. As it was, however, she had never contemplated the subject; and was so much impressed with the idea that every faculty of the mind of Lord Strathearn was absorbed in his love for her, that she gave him no credit for the reasoning powers which he possessed. And it did not appear that she had judged wrongly; for, although secretly armed with prudence, Lord Strathearn had no sooner entered her presence, than the joyous warmth of his manner proved to her how much he had felt her absence.

After endless inquiries, upon his part, about the arrangements of her journey, and a minute detail upon hers of the business which had occupied Mr. Stratford during his stay in town, the conversation naturally turned upon

the magnificent legacy that Leonora had so unexpectedly received. Lord Strathearn very sincerely congratulated her upon it, and her heart bounded as she listened to his words. It was evident that not the slightest doubt existed in his mind as to the truth of the statement; and, as he had immediately given Belinda White as his informant, she took the trouble of repeating word for word all that she knew the letter of Mr. Stratford contained. She might not have been so exact, had she not been already thoroughly aware of all that had been said and done that morning at Atherston Castle.

As it was, however, every word she uttered seemed so perfectly natural, and her expressions of affection and regret when speaking of the good Madame Satriani—who had been, as she said, a second mother to her—were so full of gratitude and love, that every moment Lord Strathearn felt his admiration for Leonora increase. So much tenderness of heart, combined with such noble sentiments and simplicity, formed a

character of no ordinary attractions. It appeared as if the discovery of every fresh grace in the nature of Leonora was a new treasure to him; and his spirits rose in proportion as the future seemed to him to deck itself more gorgeously every moment. As he thought of life with the enchanting being before him, a vision of dazzling radiancy flashed upon his view. He laughed and talked with the gaiety of a child.

Leonora fully entered into the joyousness of the moment, and eloquently described all she meant to do when she should be decked for the first time in all her finery.

“It shall be on Alice’s birthday,” she said; “she has made me promise that no one shall see any thing until that day.”

“Not even me! I think you might relax in my favour, Miss Stratford, and let me have one little glimpse, if even but of one jewel. As I am not a lady,” he added laughing, “I cannot run away with the shapes and patterns of your treasures, and I promise not to tell any thing about

what I have seen. Will you not break your vow? Lady Alice, I know, will absolve you."

"No, no—certainly not! Not even for you, Lord Strathearn, and that is saying a great deal," and she looked up at him and smiled, with a look that said a great deal more.

"You are very hard-hearted, Miss Stratford. I had hoped I deserved a little exception to be made in my favour; I am so very discreet. Are you always so tenacious about keeping your promises?"

"Always! I look upon a promise as the most sacred thing possible—whoever it may be made to, whether man or woman," was her prompt reply.

"And whether implied or given," suggested Lord Strathearn, rather timidly.

"Is not one the same as the other to an honourable mind?" asked Leonora, with a ready frankness that would have thrown an angel off his guard.

"Not quite!" replied Lord Strathearn; "most

people would think not at all. An implied promise might be only conditional."

"Which would not make it less binding—at least not in my opinion. But, then, I do not understand little quibbles and nice distinctions; they seem to me too near subterfuge. I am terribly matter of fact, I am afraid!" said Leonora, with a smile.

"May you always remain so!" answered Lord Strathearn, almost solemnly; and then, resuming his gayer tone, he added—"And so your dreadfully strict principles are to make me die of curiosity. I shall certainly ride over to Winton, and make Lady Alice release you from your promise. Must I bring a written order to be allowed to feast my eyes upon rubies and diamonds?"

"I think I may trust to *your* word!" replied Leonora, with very flattering emphasis; "but in general I am not very credulous. I think I am growing old, quite crabbed, and suspicious," and she laughed with infantine glee.

“ You are right, upon the whole, not to be too credulous, Miss Stratford. Though I suppose your distrust will all fall upon our unhappy sex. Do you not feel it increased since you have become such a rich lady ?”

“ I have not thought much about my riches yet, as far as regards myself; though I own, for my father’s sake, I was delighted when I heard the good news. But I do not suppose it can make much difference to a woman, in the estimation of her friends, whether she has a diamond necklace on or not. It is only a satisfaction to one’s vanity to be well dressed,” and Leonora, with a careless air, played with her sparkling rings as she spoke.

“ But it makes a very great difference, let me tell you, Miss Stratford,” said Lord Strathearn, laughing; “ many men will marry a rich woman, when they would not, or could not, a poor one. You will be obliged now to marry a very rich man, or you will always think you

have been sought for on account of your great wealth."

"I shall not be sought for at all. I mean to live and die a steady rich old maid—very pious, and very charitable," replied Leonora, throwing herself back in her chair, and laughing, so as to show her teeth glistening like pearls.

"You not sought for!" exclaimed Lord Strathearn, with more emotion than he cared to show. "How can you suppose such a thing? You will have hundreds of new adorers; and hundreds of old ones, who have not dared to breathe a word of the state of their affections, will come and lay their offerings at your feet. You will have hearts by wholesale—proposals without end!"

"Lord Strathearn," said Leonora, assuming an air of gravity, and looking him very steadily in the face, "I will tell you a secret that I have never told to any one in my life. What do you think it is? Something dreadful, I can assure

you. I am four-and-twenty, and I never had a proposal in my life!"

"Never?" exclaimed Lord Strathearn, in astonishment.

"Never!" repeated Leonora, without withdrawing her eyes from his face.

"Never—either directly or indirectly, Miss Stratford?" asked Lord Strathearn, with a feeling of ice running down his veins, as he remembered Belinda White's account of the proposal which she herself had carried from Mr. Selwin.

"Never—either directly or indirectly," firmly answered Leonora. "Does not that seem strange to you? It almost does to me; but I have arrived at the mature age of four-and-twenty, and I have never yet had the delight of breaking a heart—the satisfaction of hearing that I was absolutely necessary to the happiness of any man. Now, is not that a hard fate?" asked Leonora, and her gravity gave way to a merry laugh as she continued—"At

all events, it proves to you that I am no coquette; for any woman, however hideous, generally finds at least one admirer in her life. Look at Mrs. Blakemore, for instance, the most forbidding of mortals—well, I have not even been as lucky as Mrs. Blakemore. I sometimes wonder,” and she put on a soft melancholy air, “what tales of love are like. I have read them, to be sure; but a word of love, except a father’s love, I never heard.”

“Good God!” thought Lord Strathearn, “what can be her object in telling me this monstrous lie!” and so fierce a feeling of pain shot through his heart that he could not utter a word.

“You do not believe me,” said Leonora with an enchanting smile—so sweet, so natural, and so kind, it would have deceived the whole world. “It does seem odd, but it is quite true—a melancholy fact worthy of being put upon record. But you don’t pity me in the least, I see. You are really very hard-hearted, Lord Strath-

earn!" and her joyous silvery laugh again rung through the room.

"Oh, yes!" he replied, making an effort to conceal his emotion. "I do indeed—it is most extraordinary—an isolated case, I should say—not what you deserve—at least I think not."

"He is going to propose at last," said Leonora to herself, as her companion with a scared look stammered out these words; and she cast down her eyes, and, in the most innocent, unconcerned manner possible, began to smooth down the edge of the flounce upon her muslin gown, as if wholly occupied in getting out a crease that the arm of her chair had made in it.

Lord Strathearn, however, remained silent. He was so completely upset by the direct falsehood which Leonora had uttered, that he could not speak a word. What could be the meaning of thus volunteering a lie? It was true that one of his dreams had been to meet with a woman whose heart had never even been mo-

mentarily touched by words of love and grief from another. But this dream was the secret of his heart: he had never confided it to any one—least of all to the woman he intended to marry, who might have seen in it a latent suspicion of her own perfect purity and truth. Why, then, should Leonora answer as it were to his hidden thoughts, and clear herself before she was accused? The shock that her words had given him was so bewildering, that for a few moments he could not lift his eyes to hers. It seemed as if the whole fabric of his happiness, so lately raised, was tottering from the foundation, and that the smallest word on his part would send it crumbling to the earth.

Leonora, however, though apparently occupied with the border of her flounce, had contrived to venture a stealthy glance at the face of her visitor, and saw that something unusual was in his mind. But the look of embarrassment he wore was one she had seen too often to cause her any serious surprise. She hastened to

change the subject, in order to give him time to recover himself, and, resuming her gay childish manner, as if she had totally forgotten what she had last been talking about, she said suddenly, "Only four days to the ball; and Alice and I have our new gowns to have made. Which do you advise me to wear, Lord Strathearn—pink or blue?"

The question was so totally irrelevant to the subject of his thoughts, that Lord Strathearn absolutely started when it reached his ear, and, raising his head, he fixed his eyes once more upon the face of Leonora. It was radiant with smiles, and she went on gaily, as she observed his perplexed look—

"Now, answer me truly and properly, Lord Strathearn, and don't say you don't know any thing about it; or give papa's answer, that one will do just as well as the other. I must have good, sound advice upon such a knotty point. Which shall I wear, pink or blue?"

"Well," replied Lord Strathearn, trying to

resume his former manner, "I really think, in spite of your warning, I must a little incline to Mr. Stratford's opinion : with beauty such as yours, Miss Stratford, what can the colour of your dress signify?"

"A great deal—every thing, perhaps—who knows? or, as Belinda White always says, 'one never can tell what may happen.' Now, suppose I was to disgust some very important personage by wearing a colour to which they had an antipathy? There would be a pretty business: and all because you will not give me proper advice! I hope, Lord Strathearn, you see the quantity of self-reproach you may have to endure some day for such an act of omission," said Leonora with a serious air.

"I really could not presume to give advice upon such a subject to any lady. If the colour was not becoming, I might be killed outright by a frown. You would not have me run such a risk as that, Miss Stratford?"

"But at all events you can tell me which

you like the best yourself; that will be some help, for I know your taste is perfect;" and Leonora cast her eyes timidly over the dress of Lord Strathearn, and ended her survey with an approving smile.

"Well, then, I like pink the best for a ball," replied Lord Strathearn, for no better reason than that the sleeves of Leonora were tied with ribbons of that colour; and then he added, but more in accordance with his own thoughts than for any other purpose—"but it does not signify much to you, I should think, Miss Stratford, what I like or dislike."

"I do not know why you should say that, Lord Strathearn, unless indeed from the spirit of contradiction;" and Leonora, as she spoke, lowered her voice and cast down her eyes in the most modest manner possible, as if she feared this half-avowal of the interest she took in Lord Strathearn's opinions was somewhat more than maidenly. The manœuvre, however, was lost upon him, for he was not looking at her.

He seemed as if he was studying the pattern on the carpet; for he still kept his eyes fixed upon it, as he answered, rather more bitterly than the subject seemed to demand—

“Oh! you would not care much, I am afraid: no one would care. You will dance just as gaily at the ball whether I am pleased or not. You will have plenty of admirers. All the world will be at your feet, of course.”

“Admirers!” echoed Leonora, now convinced that jealousy of some individual was rankling at the bottom of his heart. “Have I not already told you, Lord Strathearn, that not only I have not one, but that I never had one in my life!”

“Then all your acquaintances must have been deaf as well as blind,” replied Lord Strathearn trying to smile; “but I foretell that they will not long remain so. And so you have decided on the pink dress for the ball, Miss Stratford?” he inquired, suddenly recurring to the subject, apparently without a reason.

“Quite decided—as it is your choice,” was the reply of Leonora, with the sweetest of smiles, and the most meaning of looks. Lord Strathearn perfectly understood it, and his eyes rested for a moment, sadly, on the exceeding beauty of her face; but the spirit of distrust, laid to sleep by the wand of love, had been rudely wakened from its slumber, and was now tearing his heart with its merciless fangs. He determined that nothing should make him speak—no, not one word that he could not retract. And so he sought refuge in the most commonplace remarks; though they were all uttered with a slight tone of asperity, that plainly showed to the watchful Leonora a spirit but ill at ease.

“A ball in the country is certainly a great event,” he said. “It is a pity we cannot enjoy the preparations for it as much as you do. At all events, it would give us occupation.”

“Men do not care so much about their appearance as women do in general, I think,

and some do not want it," replied Leonora in a flattering tone; though she took care not to raise her eyes from the very well-made boots of her visitor, which she seemed to be contemplating approvingly.

"And some care a great deal more, I am quite certain. There is Stuart Devereux, for example; you should see the time he takes to dress! I am sure you are not half so long. I hope you admire him sufficiently, when he is well got up," was Lord Strathearn's reply, in something of his old laughing manner.

"I hardly ever see Mr. Devereux," replied Leonora haughtily, as if she thought she did him great honour to see him at all. A sudden idea had struck her, and she now seemed to hold the clue to the mystery she had hitherto been unable to unravel. She was going to say something more, when the striking of a clock upon the chimneypiece attracted the attention of Lord Strathearn. He took his hat from a chair by his side, and said—

"It is very late, and I must go; I ought not to have stayed so long. I am afraid I have tired you to death, Miss Stratford. You must have had a succession of visitors since daybreak, congratulating you on your good fortune."

"No, Lord Strathearn," replied Leonora, somewhat sadly, "I have seen no one all day. You are my only visitor, and I may safely say the only one I wished in the least to see;" and then, as if to qualify this speech, she added smiling—"Our Whittington visitors are not very attractive."

"And so you have been sitting alone all day? Not one visitor to enliven the time?"

"Not one of any kind except you!" was the reply of Leonora; and Lord Strathearn, from the tone, knew so well the look that accompanied the words, that he turned his head to the window, which was on his right side, and pretended to be occupied in admiring the beautiful crimson roses that were hanging in

clusters round it. He did not particularly care to meet the pleading eyes of Leonora, which looked so touchingly soft through their long fringes. They would, however, have been less dangerous than the object upon which his own suddenly lighted as he withdrew them from the contemplation of the roses.

A glove was lying on the carpet, just half concealed by the shadow of the window curtain. That glove! Lord Strathearn knew it in an instant. It could only belong to Stuart Devereux, and was one of those that had arrived that morning, and which had excited so much of his attention. There was no mistaking it; for it was of a very peculiar shade of brown, and a little blue stone was in the centre of the gold button. Stuart Devereux had been eloquent in its praise, for the pattern was his own invention. Lord Strathearn, therefore, could not have been deceived; Mr. Devereux had been at The Cliffs that day, while Leonora had flatly denied having

had any visitor at all. The heart of Lord Strathearn swelled within him; but he instantly decided upon his course.

“Miss Stratford,” he said, getting up, “will you allow me to ring for my horses? I think they have taken them from the door.”

“Oh, certainly!” replied Leonora, also rising with alacrity, “if you will go so early; but I shall hope to see you again very soon. I am always at home at this hour.”

As she spoke, she turned to ring the bell, as Lord Strathearn had asked permission to do: during that instant he stooped down, and, possessing himself of the fatal glove, consigned it to his pocket. In another moment he was gone, and, as he rode slowly down the road, he turned, and for a moment reined in his beautiful brown horse, in order to take a look at the house he had quitted. It was a long low house, with flowers and creepers clustering all about it, and twining round the pillars of the veranda that shaded one side. The pleasure-ground was ;

beautiful, and the house seemed reposing in a nest of evergreens and flowers, backed by the high hill with its magnificent hanging woods. Lord Strathearn, though he had seen it all often before, now took in every object at a glance. He observed even the gleaming of the white dress of Leonora, as she sat in the drawing-room where he had left her. One long look he gave again to every object around, and then he rode on. That picture was indelibly engraven upon his memory and his heart—his wounded and sorrowful heart. Years afterwards it lingered there still!

CHAPTER XL.

At last the long wished-for day arrived, and the ambitious Leonora saw at least one of the dreams of her whole life gorgeously realized. She was dressed for the ball at Winton Park, and, as she stood in her dressing-room giving the last touches to her already perfect toilet, she felt a thrill of such irrepressible delight that she almost doubted the evidence of her senses: was it possible that she was the possessor of so much wealth? As she stood contemplating the effect it produced, her vanity was as much gratified as her pride. The regal style of her beauty permitted a freer indulgence in her love of splendour, without exceeding the limits of good taste, than could have been accorded to charms of a more unpretending style. The

dazzling crown of jewels that encircled her brow seemed the only ornament that would have suited it; every thing else she wore corresponded exactly in the same manner, and instead of overloading, only enhanced the grace and symmetry of her figure. It was a pretty sight to see her, as, with almost childish delight, she clasped upon her beautiful arms bracelets of gems that looked as if they might have been the ransom of kings, and exhibited them to her doating father, who had come to her room, as her dressing drew nigh completion, to take the first look at his darling child decked out for the first time in all her finery.

And there sat the good old man, the confiding loving parent, gazing upon his beautiful but worthless daughter, and glorying in the splendour that was her shame. Happy in his ignorance and his trust, Mr. Stratford seemed to have grown young again, so vivid was his delight as he looked upon his daughter. He was seated in a low chair by the side of the

dressing-table, his dark eyes glistening through his spectacles, as he watched with the most intense interest every movement of the slender fingers of Leonora, as she altered or arranged the position of her various ornaments; sometimes accepting, and sometimes rejecting many of the splendid jewels offered to her by her maid, who stood by with the sparkling casket, and thought her young lady could never put on enough.

Leonora, however, was not likely to err in the point of good taste in dress; and when at length she pronounced herself satisfied, and Mr. Stratford took off his spectacles as she proposed to depart, nothing more beautiful could be seen. Leonora gave one look more at her rose-coloured gown with its ærial draperies, which she fervently hoped would produce the desired effect, and then putting on her cloak, she followed her father to the carriage and was soon on her way towards Winton Park.

And, all this time, what had been her thoughts? Nothing had crossed her mind but

ambitious views and hopes. The future was her only dream; the past seemed quietly consigned to oblivion: thrown by as something useless; not worthy even of a place in her memory. It was astonishing to see the power that the love of gain and desire for splendour exercised over her fears: it was as if she forcibly pushed them from her, lest they might interfere with her views. One pang of remorse, to the eye that could have read her heart, would have seemed a brighter jewel than any which she wore; but no such sanctifying thrill was there: hard, and cold, and worldly, she went upon her way rejoicing. The hour of retribution was not yet come.

Her anticipations of success were not, however, quite so sanguine at this moment, as they had been a few days before. A great deal, however, might depend upon that evening, and she had looked forward to the ball quite as much as to a moment which was to be very eventful in deciding upon her fate, as to

a pleasure that was to be enjoyed for its own sake.

It is very curious how or why a crowd can be productive of the anomalous effects constantly expected from it: yet so it is; and there are few large gatherings together of persons, where many hearts have not thrilled with the deepest alternations of hope and fear, that would have been perfectly tranquil had they remained at home. It may be urged that a crowd gives opportunity of meeting that no other place affords; but it is the will and not the opportunity that is generally wanting, and in the case of Leonora and her admirers, whose actions were totally unfettered, such a plea could not be advanced. And yet, although perfectly aware of this, Leonora looked forward to the ball at Winton, as to the turning-point in her destiny. A sort of superstitious mixture of hope and fear kept her in perpetual agitation; and, as she journeyed towards the longed-for, yet half-dreaded scene, she could scarcely

analyze her own emotions, so contradictory was their nature. It is possible, although she would not confess it to herself, that some sharp twinges of conscience might have lent their aid to render the maze of her thoughts a little more perplexing; but it is quite certain that there was considerably more uneasiness mingled with her other feelings, than had existed a few days before.

When she had meditated and carried into effect the bold scheme of her journey to London, she had not the slightest doubt but that Lord Strathearn meant to propose to her immediately. She thought so still; though there was a singularity in his conduct that she could not account for. His manner during his last visit had certainly not conveyed the impression that he was indifferent to her; and yet, since his hurried departure on that day, she had not once seen him: he, who appeared so enchanted with her society, had suffered four whole days to elapse without again seeking her presence. This did not look very *empresé*,

and was in exact contradiction to what she had expected; but she could in no way account for the fact. She called to mind very distinctly the whole conversation that had passed between them on that day. She could have repeated it word for word; but there did not seem to have been one that could have given him the idea that his visits were not most welcome. Want of encouragement, therefore, had certainly not been her fault; then the idea occurred, that perhaps she had been too gracious, and she resolved to throw a shade more of reserve into her manner on their next meeting. And thus she went on, looking at the matter in every possible point of view, and debating it with herself until she was almost bewildered with conjectures. And, as not one of the hundred reasons that she conjured up as excuses for the long absence of Lord Strathearn really satisfied her mind, she at length chose to fasten on one of the most improbable of all, and decided that the cause

of his not coming near her was the impending ball.

He had jokingly remarked upon the importance of the event to ladies in the country, and doubtless he believed that a vast deal of preparation was necessary. He also knew that she would probably be summoned by Alice to Winton Park many times before the day of the ball; and it was, therefore, in order not to interrupt her in such pressing occupations, that he had kept himself so secluded at Atherston Castle. In this manner she tried to impress upon her mind that there was nothing wrong—nothing the least alarming; and that the next interview would certainly decide her fate, for she was quite sure Lord Strathearn was devoted to her. From Stuart Devereux, who early or late was daily her visitor, she could learn nothing, except the mere fact of his friend's being still at Atherston. Either he did not know how Lord Strathearn spent his mornings, or he did not choose to give Leonora

any intelligence which she seemed anxious to obtain ; and as she, for her own reasons, was very cautious of irritating the small jealous nature of her supplementary admirer, she remained in total ignorance upon the point most interesting to her. She, however, consoled herself for this very disagreeable position, by reflecting upon the admirable manner in which she was playing her cards. Stuart Devereux might become useful some day or other, and she had latterly bestowed more attention upon the advice Belinda White had given her, than she at first had thought possible. Stuart Devereux, on his side, had not been idle. Since the announcement of Leonora's riches, his admiration had visibly increased : not a day passed without his calling at The Cliffs ; and, as his visits became habitual, so they began to grow less irksome to the fair object of them.

Leonora disliked him quite as much as ever ; but she was growing used to him, and he was link between her and Atherston that she would

not have liked to break. The mind of Stuart Devereux was exceedingly relieved by observing the very evident seclusion of his brother. He could not have endured that Sir Edward should have carried off any prize which he himself could not obtain; and, as the admiration of Sir Edward for Leonora had at first been very openly expressed, Stuart took up the idea that he had proposed to her and been refused, and that that was the cause of his shutting himself up as he did, and feeling an evident distaste to society.

This impression was extremely gratifying to the inordinate vanity of Stuart Devereux. From the manner in which Leonora received his attentions, though she sometimes was rather stately, he had no reason to believe they were disagreeable to her; and to succeed where his brother had been foiled, would be a triumph which he anticipated with no small delight. At first, the idea of throwing himself away upon a dowerless bride had sometimes caused him a pang; but now, that Leonora was rich,

the case was entirely altered. His marriage would now be attended with the greatest *éclat*; his wife would be a celebrity in the world of fashion; and, after she had made a sufficient sensation to ensure a great increase of consequence and position to him, he secretly resolved to appropriate to himself the greater part of her riches. He had fully made up his mind to propose to Leonora while she was still in the country: he was in no hurry to be married; but he dreaded a season in London, of which she already talked with anticipations of delight. There was, however, plenty of time before the spring, and it suited him much better to wait till then; for his hunters at Melton were in perfect order, and he did not see any object in losing his favourite amusement for a whole season, merely to go on a sentimental wedding-tour.

This comfortably selfish arrangement was, however, seriously interfered with by the discovery that he speedily made of Lord Strathearn's constant visits to The Cliffs. They


certainly did not appear to change the manner of Leonora towards himself; but still they were the cause of very great uneasiness. Stuart Devereux knew too well the attractions of rank and wealth, not to feel that they were very serious obstacles in his path; but he was powerless in this instance. He could neither annul the existence of Lord Strathearn, nor prevent his entertaining the idea of marrying any woman he chose to select. All he could do was, to exert himself a little more than he had intended, and try to be foremost in the race.

He was well read in the character and position of Lord Strathearn; he knew both how much he had been sought after, and his innate horror of being "taken in." He calculated, therefore, that his rival's movements would be necessarily extremely cautious; and that, with a little cleverness on his own part, he might manage to carry off the prize before any one was aware of his intentions. He became, consequently, very circumspect; and, so well had

his measures been taken, that, until the unlucky finding of the glove, Lord Strathearn had no idea that Mr. Devereux ever called at The Cliffs, much less that he was even a more constant visitor there than he was himself. He had never taken the trouble to inquire where he spent his mornings; while Stuart Devereux had the advantage of always knowing exactly what Lord Strathearn meant to do every day of his life; for he had a habit of always ordering his horses in the morning when he was dressing. The knowledge of this fact had enabled Mr. Devereux to avoid meeting him, and his visits to Leonora were therefore never inopportune. And so every thing seemed to go on very prosperously for him, until the discovery of Lord Strathearn threatened a more immediate danger than he could have anticipated.

CHAPTER XII.

A GREAT many people had already arrived when Mr. Stratford and his daughter entered the ball-room at Winton Park, and, before long, it was completely filled. Every body from Whittington was there, even Mr. and Mrs. Percy Linklater, who were much too insignificant to have been left out, and who thought themselves of marvellous consequence from being admitted. The truth was, that Lady Glanberris had given Belinda White leave to invite any one she chose; and the kind-hearted creature could not bear to inflict such a wound upon the self-love of Mrs. Percy as to exclude her from her list. It is true that the brow of Lord Glanberris slightly darkened as she made her appearance; but she soon mingled in the crowd, and he saw her no more.



Mrs. Percy, having other plans in view, had not been so violent lately in insisting that Lord Glanberris "should do something for Percy," in right of his consanguinity. This was a great relief, and reconciled the Earl to allowing her to fidget about his rooms, where no one was likely to talk to her except the good-natured Belinda White. Belinda White that evening looked radiant in her rich gown of pale green flowered silk, and blonde cap and roses. Her dress had been a present from Alice; who, as it was her birth-day, was allowed innumerable privileges.

It was Lady Alice who had ordained that Leonora should come to the ball attired like a queen; and she had no sooner perceived her entering the room, than she went to her, and, taking her from the arm of her proud father, led her up to Lady Glanberris with an air of delight that showed how free from all jealousy was her amiable disposition. Lady Glanberris, herself a model of purity

and goodness, received her as though she had been another daughter, and cared very little that her own fine family jewels were reduced to comparative insignificance by those of her guest. She was very sincere in her congratulations upon the subject, which congratulations were echoed on every side; for Leonora had studiously made friends with all whom she met: and thus was this fair but unworthy social impostor raised almost to the rank of a divinity in her own opinion. What a moment of exultation it was to her, when she stood by the side of Lady Glanberris, accepting the general homage that was so lavishly offered to her! Her proud heart swelled with triumph, as she received the guerdon of her well-matured devices; and her fine eyes sparkled with delight, as every now and then the pretty Alice—who in her floating white dress, looked like an attendant sylph as she hovered about her—whispered in her ear some compliment yet more flattering than the last which she had overheard in

the crowd. Dancing soon began, and Lady Glanberris, released from her arduous duties, took her seat upon a sofa at the top of the room. She looked so fair, and happy, and handsome in her rich blue dress, as she smiled with a kindly glance upon all around, that the motherless heart was cheered as it met that smile. There was comfort as well as pleasure in the thoughts of all who could hail Lady Glanberris as a friend.

In the first moment of excitement upon entering the room, it was not possible for Leonora to ascertain whether, in all that gay crowd before her, the persons whom she most desired to see were comprised. There were several rooms open besides the conservatory; and the terrace outside the house was lighted and lined with seats. It would have been difficult to have seen every one at once; but in the ball-room, which was a square room, each person was distinctly visible, and Leonora soon convinced herself that none of the inmates of

Atherston Castle were present. The first dance was over, and the second had begun and ended, and still they did not appear. It was very early, and yet Leonora began to feel somewhat surprised. She had calculated upon Sir Edward Devereux and his friends all reaching Atherston before her, and had even kept herself disengaged for the first quadrilles, in the expectation that her hand would have been immediately claimed by at least Lord Strathearn and Mr. Devereux, even if Sir Edward, as had been reported, was too unwell to dance. Such, however, not being the case, she was forced to accept of other partners, and she went through the routine of the figures in a strange pre-occupation of mind, that did not add to the vivacity of her movements. It was not until she had taken her place for the fourth time in a quadrille, that she was relieved from her anxiety by the voice of Alice, who whispered, as she passed her in the dance—"There is Sir Edward Devereux come at last."

It appeared that Lady Alice only thought it worth while to mention Sir Edward; but, as Leonora turned her head towards the door, she saw that his brother was with him. They had, it seemed, only just arrived; for they were making their way to the end of the room where Lady Glanberris was sitting.

Sir Edward looked, as Leonora thought, more pale and languid than ever; and she observed that, as soon as he had had some minutes' conversation with Lady Glanberris, he just stood looking for a few moments at the dancers, and then moved away into the next room. Leonora felt exceedingly mortified. She had imagined that he would have come immediately to where she was standing, and at least said something civil about the brilliancy of her appearance, as every one else had done. He had observed it, she had no doubt; for she had seen him fix his eyes steadily upon her. Those large dark grey eyes had too searching an expression to be mistaken even at a distance;

and Leonora felt certain that not a detail of her superb dress had escaped his notice. This made his not speaking to her still more remarkable; but it was probably only a momentary neglect, and therefore did not involve any mystery.

She tried to comfort herself with this reflection; but her fears too readily suggested some secret motive wherever Sir Edward was concerned, and she continued anxiously to watch the door through which he had disappeared, all the time the quadrille lasted. She felt, however, stung to the quick; for, in spite of all the debasing ramifications of intrigue in which she was engaged, she would have preferred seeing Sir Edward Devereux claim the place by her side, to any other event that could have happened. This feeling, of which she was perfectly conscious, only tended to make her present degradation more complete—her future punishment more bitter.

If, however, Sir Edward looked, as many of the Whittington gossips feelingly remarked,

“as if he had not many days to live,” the same remark could not well be applied to his brother. Stuart Devereux was brilliant that night, in all the glory of his diamond studs and plaited frills. Nothing could be more elaborately got up, from the jewelled button of the delicate white glove that seemed pasted to his fat hands, to his marvellously shining shoes, that made his great broad feet look still broader. His rosy cheeks glowed with delight, which was not lessened as he pushed his way through the crowd and beheld the glorious beauty of Leonora, heightened as it was that night by the splendour of her dress. He immediately stationed himself by her side, and engaged her for the next dance, which was to be a waltz, whereupon he looked supremely happy, and allowed her to finish the last figure of her quadrille in peace. As soon as it was over, and that she could disengage herself from her partner, she sunk upon the nearest chair,

and said abruptly to Stuart Devereux, who had followed and was speaking to her—

“Is Sir Edward here?”

“To be sure he is—why, he came with me. Did you not see him?” Mr. Devereux spoke in rather a sulky tone, for he did not like having the *fade* compliment he was paying to Leonora thus unceremoniously cut short: he had been getting it ready all the time the drive from Atherston had lasted.

“No!” boldly answered Leonora. “Is he in the room?” She looked about carelessly, and then added in the same abrupt way—“And Lord Strathearn! Is he come, too? What made you all so late?”

“Are we late?” he asked, closing his eyes and trying to look sentimental; “I am glad you thought so. It was Edward’s fault: he could not make up his mind whether he would come at all. He is worse than ever to day. I really believe that was what drove Strathearn away.”

“How! Away!” exclaimed Leonora in a very natural tone of surprise. “Lord Strathearn gone away!”

“Yes! Didn’t I tell you?—well I meant to. Yes—it is a melancholy fact! Strathearn has departed. Gone this very day. Are you sorry, Miss Stratford?” and he fixed his great round eyes disagreeably upon the face of Leonora. She would have been delighted at that moment if the earth had opened and swallowed him up. But her face was immoveable, as she haughtily replied—

“Me—I sorry! certainly not! What could it be to me?”

“Nothing, I hope,” said Stuart Devereux, in a tone that he meant should be excessively touching; “only I thought you might be disappointed at not having him to dance with you to-night. I tried to make him stay: but nothing could persuade him, and he actually set off for Dover just as we started to come here.”

“For Dover!” echoed Leonora, trying to

speak carelessly, though she felt as if she was in danger of falling off her chair.

“Yes! he is off to Germany, or somewhere: I don’t know where; and I don’t think he knows himself. He has been in such a crazy state these several days, there was no getting a word out of him. Between him and Edward, I assure you, Miss Stratford, Atherston has been quite unbearable—something like a lunatic asylum where the inmates are pronounced harmless. I am moped to death there. It is only when I come over to The Cliffs that I really enjoy myself.”

Leonora gave him a look expressive of the utmost aversion, but said nothing. He did not perceive it; and, as to her not answering, he was used to what he called “her airs,” and did not mind them. So, in another moment, he went on—

“Shall you be at home to-morrow, Miss Stratford?”

“No! Mr. Devereux,” promptly replied the

young lady; and then as she recollected that, by refusing to see him, she was cutting off the only means of hearing of those in whom she was the most interested, she added—

“That is, not in the morning—not too early; but I will let you know.”

“Oh! thank you, Miss Stratford; that is very good of you. Any hour will do for me. What hour would not, if I could be with you?” he added tenderly; and then, casting a timid glance at the fine jewels she wore, he made some very commonplace remarks upon her appearance, intermingled with extravagant compliments.

Leonora either did not, or pretended not to hear a word that he said. She felt so thoroughly mortified and wretched, that she was completely stunned by her own sensations. Was she, then, never to be at peace?—never to see her hopes crowned with success? Never to find a haven of rest, but to be shipwrecked in the very port? These thoughts seemed to dart like fiery arrows through her


brain. No wonder that the *platitudes* of Mr. Devereux fell unheeded on her ear. She only knew that his voice was more odious to her than ever; that by it she had been hurled back into a sea of troubles. The sole manner he could have recommended himself to her was by leaving her totally alone; this, however, Mr. Devereux had no intention of doing. As long as his attentions were not positively repelled, he chose to consider them as accepted; and therefore, in his opinion, every moment that passed gave him an additional right to remain by the side of Leonora, and prevent any one else from talking to her.

Leonora said no more; but, pale and rigid, sat as if transfixed to her chair, caring very little whether Mr. Devereux was pleased or displeased by her manner. The business of a ball-room, however, may not stand still, even to give one moment's ease to the aching heart that loathes the gaiety of each sight and sound. A few minutes' solitude would, just then, have

been to Leonora a treasure as great as the brightest gem she wore; but it was not to be accorded to her: she must play her part in the pageant of the hour.

"This is our waltz, Miss Stratford," said the tiresome voice of Stuart Devereux in her ear, and he immediately offered her his arm.

"*Our waltz!*" She heard the words distinctly, and they fell upon her heart and seemed to turn it to stone. Was it possible that the unattractive being by her side should ever say "ours," in speaking to her? Her proud lip curled with anger and disdain; but a resistless power seemed to urge her on. She rose from her chair, and, taking the expectant arm, moved mechanically forward. Mr. Devereux was in raptures. He had never waltzed with Leonora before, and was particularly delighted to do so now, because he saw that his brother had come into the room, and was observing his movements. His vanity also was thoroughly gratified by having the most beautiful and best



dressed partner in the room. He happened to waltz extremely well; and, between the enlivening strains of Strauss's band and the rapidity of the movement, which suited well with the wild excitement of her thoughts, Leonora partially recovered. Her presence of mind seldom deserted her, and she soon roused herself sufficiently to resume enough of her natural manner to enable her to escape observation.

When the waltz was over, and Mr. Devereux, renewing his amiable attentions, had entreated of Leonora to dance again with him that evening, he proposed to take a turn in the conservatory. Leonora, glad to escape even momentarily from the crowd and the glare, willingly consented. As she turned to leave the room, her eyes encountered those of Sir Edward Devereux which were fixed upon her. He bowed very coldly, almost haughtily to her, and then moved away, and she saw him no more. Leonora half determined to go into the next room and speak to him. She could not

bear the suspense she was suffering, and the inexplicable mystery that seemed to overshadow her. She thought it better to see Sir Edward at once, and resolved to make the attempt. But how to get rid of her companion? She was leaning on his arm, and he was urging her towards the door of the conservatory; it was just the fullest part of the room, and they advanced very slowly.

“I thought you were engaged to Lady Alice Percy, Mr. Devereux! I am sure I heard you ask her to dance,” she said to him, in the desperate hope that he would relieve her of his company.

“So I am; but for the next quadrille. It will not begin just yet: we shall have time enough to take a walk among the flowers. Are you fond of flowers, Miss Stratford?”

“Very!” replied Leonora; and, seeing there was no chance of freedom for the moment, she suffered herself to be led onwards through the crowd. They crept on by degrees, and were

approaching the door, when, just as Leonora was trying to reach it and guarding her light robe from the unmerciful crushing of some weighty dowagers in overwhelming brocades, a hand was laid upon her arm. She could only turn her head, and immediately found the kind smiling face of Belinda White close to her ear, and a whisper that seemed to freeze her heart, distinctly reached her—

“For God’s sake, my dear,” it said, “be careful! Your secret is suspected, if not actually discovered;” and, before the terrified girl could ask her a question, Belinda White had disappeared. “Her secret!” Leonora tottered, rather than walked forwards, and actually clung to the arm of Stuart Devereux for support. He, poor man, imagining that this was some marvellous expression of affection, suddenly lost all his bashfulness, and, taking the little hand that lay trembling on his arm, ventured gently to press it to his heart. Leonora, perfectly unconscious of the action, was literally gasping for breath.

"Her secret!" Was her doom then decreed? and was she about to be hurled from the proud position she had usurped? The fairy scene before her seemed to vanish suddenly, and darkness, utter darkness, to fall upon her. She closed her eyes for an instant, as if to shut out the dreadful vision, and at that moment Mr. Devereux perceived her emotion.

"You are not well, Miss Stratford; you look quite pale! It was the heat of the room, I am sure. Shall I get you any thing? or will you come out into the open air?" he exclaimed hurriedly; and the tone of his voice was so kind and anxious, that it worked a sudden change in the feelings of Leonora. She, who was so crushed, so tortured by what she called "her adverse fate," though it was but the result of her own hypocrisy, felt a sensation of comfort in the steady kindness even of Stuart Devereux. It seemed to afford a momentary resting-place to her harassed senses, and she

answered more gently than she had hitherto spoken—

“No, thank you, Mr. Devereux! There is nothing the matter with me. It was only the heat of the ball-room; but this cool air will revive me. Shall we walk round the conservatory?”

“If you are able, I shall be delighted; but I wish you had a shawl. Shall I go and get you one, or something to put on? I am so afraid you will be chilled.”

“Thank you—thank you, very much!” said Leonora, sadly; “but I am not afraid of the cold: it does me good; and the flowers are so beautiful.”

She bent over some that were near her for a moment; and then, having recovered at least the appearance of tranquillity, they began their walk. The whisper of Belinda White still hissed in her ears, and she did not hear one word of all that Mr. Devereux was saying to her; but her manner was kind, and he was

satisfied. The conservatory at Winton was very large, and full of rare and beautiful plants and flowers. The trees in the centre were high, forming a thick screen down the middle, and there was a walk on each side, bordered with flowers, where seats were placed at intervals. The end of the conservatory formed a large alcove, with several windows opening down to the ground, and the terrace that led to the pleasure-ground was close outside. The conservatory was brilliantly lighted, so that, even to the smallest flower, every thing within it was visible.

Leonora and her companion had gone once round, and then walked down again to the end, where they stood admiring the beautiful blossoms spread in profusion around. The windows were all open, and the soft summer air had evidently done wonders in reviving the drooping Leonora; for she looked nearly as usual as she stood apparently enjoying the beauty of the scene, and her voice had recovered its tone.

Mr. Devereux was extremely happy. He certainly seemed to have made considerable progress that night. He never ceased talking; but at length, having exhausted all his complimentary speeches, and brought in all the quotations from Lord Byron and Walter Scott that he could think of, he turned to other subjects for help.


“And so Miss Stratford,” he said, “you are not sorry that Strathearn is gone?”

“Not in the least, Mr. Devereux!” replied Leonora, decidedly.

“Well! I am—he is such a very nice, good fellow: that is, I should have been sorry at another time; but just now, Miss Stratford, I don’t care so much. Can’t you guess why?”

“I have not the slightest idea,” she replied; and Mr. Devereux continued, looking very silly as he spoke—

“Well! I shall not tell you—at least not now; but are you quite sure, Miss Stratford, that you are not sorry?”



“Mr. Devereux, I have told you before that I am not; Lord Strathearn’s movements are a matter of perfect indifference to me: I neither regret his going, nor have the least wish ever to see him again. What more can I say?” The tone of Leonora was so decided, and her manner so frank, that it filled her companion with delight; and he exclaimed joyously, with a sort of childish expression—

“Oh, I am so glad! I fancied you were sorry, and I should not have liked that.” At that moment the first notes of the recommending music were heard; and Leonora, who just then did not want the conversation to go any further, exclaimed—

“There is your quadrille, Mr. Devereux! They are going to begin: you must not keep Lady Alice waiting.”

“Oh, dear! what shall I do?” he answered, looking about in great agitation; “I wish I hadn’t engaged myself; I had so much rather stay here with you.”

Leonora smiled, but immediately replied—
“Oh, it is quite impossible ! It would be so very rude to Alice; and you know she has not much patience : indeed, you had better go at once.”

“Well, then, where shall I find you again? I shall come away the moment the quadrille is over. I have such a quantity to say to you, Miss Stratford,” answered he, in a very flurried manner.

“I shall be here—I shall be glad of a little rest,” said Leonora, sitting down on the seat by the window which was close to her; “and, if I find this grow too cold, I shall be in the blue drawing-room. I must let the ball exhaust itself a little, before I dance any more.”

“Oh! I shall find you wherever you are, Miss Stratford,” was the joyous answer of her companion; and then he added more timidly—
“In the mean time will you wear this; it is exactly the colour of your dress?” As he spoke, he broke off a beautiful blossom from a rose-

coloured geranium, and gave it to her. Leonora quietly took the flower and began to fasten it to the front of her gown, and Mr. Devereux departed to fulfil his engagement with Lady Alice.

The conservatory was quite deserted; for the air was too cold, when compared to the heat of the rooms, for people to stay there long. The cold was, however, delicious to Leonora, whose fevered blood and excited brain craved for repose. She was, however, not long destined to enjoy it, for she had sat but a few moments alone, and was still occupied in arranging her geranium blossom so as not to hide the magnificence of the gems she wore, when a movement at the window by her side attracted her attention. She raised her head as some one entered with a quick step. Lord Strathearn was standing before her!

CHAPTER XIII.

WITH an expression of unfeigned delight upon her countenance, Leonora half rose from her seat, and, extending her hand, exclaimed—"Lord Strathearn! What an unexpected pleasure! How very glad I am to see you!" The great falsehood, as she thought, of Mr. Devereux's information, rushed upon her mind as she spoke; but, to her infinite surprise, Lord Strathearn neither took her offered hand, nor returned the cordial greeting she had given him. He merely raised his hat, and making a slight, but very formal bow, he said—

"Miss Stratford, as I have just overheard you make a directly contrary declaration to

Mr. Devereux, I will spare you the trouble of unsaying your words."

The fatal mistake of Leonora was instantly apparent to her; but she tried to cover it by a fresh subterfuge—"How! what can you mean, Lord Strathearn?" she asked, in a tone of well-affected sorrow and surprise. "You cannot imagine that I seriously meant what I said, or that I was stupid enough to tell Mr. Devereux the exact truth as to my opinions with regard to you."

"No!" replied Lord Strathearn gravely, and speaking slowly, as if he was weighing every word he uttered—"I do not suppose that you intended to tell the exact truth to Mr. Devereux."

"Of course not!" replied Leonora with a laugh; but he continued, with still more gravity than before—

"It is a dreadful thing to think of a total want of truth and honour in any person, but still more dreadful, more painful, when that

person is a woman—and that woman one whom one has loved; but, Miss Stratford, you must pardon me if I say to you, that I fear you would not speak the truth to any one, or on any subject, unless it suited your purpose.”

“Lord Strathearn!” said Leonora, growing very pale, and with an air of embarrassment she could not conceal; “are you really serious, or is this only meant as a jest? I have a great mind,” she added, with an hysterical laugh, which had something wild in its sound, “to take it all as gravely as you have spoken it; and to be extremely angry with you for preaching such a sermon to me.”

“The time is past,” he replied, almost solemnly, “when your anger would indeed have been grief to me. If my words appear harsh, Miss Stratford, I have already asked you to forgive them; but I cannot disguise my thoughts in milder phrases, and our relative positions imperatively command this explanation.”

“I want no explanation, Lord Strathearn, and

do not even know what you allude to !” was the defying answer of Leonora, as she folded her arms calmly and settled her bracelet, as if quite indifferent to what he was saying.

“You may not—but I do !” said Lord Strathearn coldly, and quite unawed by the assumed haughtiness of her manner: “I owe it to myself to act as a man of honour should always act. It is this feeling that has brought me here—that has made me retrace my steps, when I was already some way upon my journey.”

“You are really talking riddles to me, Lord Strathearn ! I have not the most remote idea what you mean,” said Leonora in a softened tone; for his last words contained a sort of admission, through which a hope instantly glimmered.

“It was this,” continued Lord Strathearn, with more agitation in his manner than he had yet shown, “which made me feel I could not leave England without seeing you once more;

for I knew that my manner and attentions to you had been such as only became the man who intended to ask you to be his wife."

The start with which Leonora received these last words was unperceived by Lord Strathearn, who, totally absorbed by his own feelings, was looking at her, but without observing the impression his disclosures created. He went on, now speaking lower and more rapidly—

"That such was my intention—such my dearest, fondest hope—God knows to be true! and the reason of that intention being changed, Miss Stratford, you must look for in your own heart. I had always made a vow not to marry a woman whom I could not trust. How, then, dared I to trust to one who seemed bent upon deceiving me, even in every trifle?"

"I cannot, in the least, see how I ever attempted to deceive you, Lord Strathearn, or what possible object I could have had in so doing; and, I must say, I think this accusation extremely unjust," observed Leonora, proudly.

"It is no accusation; it is simply a justification of myself—an explanation of the motives that led to a change of conduct which must have surprised, if not offended you; for you had a right—and you must have felt it, Miss Stratford—you had a right to expect a very different communication from that which I have been forced to make to you."

"And may I ask in what these very grave offences against truth and honour consisted?" said Leonora, with a scornful laugh, but fixing her eyes keenly on her companion as she spoke.


His face, however, showed no sign of relenting: it was cold and stern, although very full of sorrow; but he went resolutely on, through the painful task his sense of right had imposed upon him, and he answered, while the tears, restrained by pride, were trembling in his dark eyes—

"Yes, Miss Stratford; you have a right to know, and I am here but to tell you. Many times since our acquaintance began, I had ob-

served that you were singularly averse to telling the simple truth upon any subject; but it was during my last visit to you, that your own words confirmed this impression in a manner which has destroyed the happiness—the unspeakable happiness—to which I looked forward with intense joy. Twice that day did you deliberately state to me what was false.”

“And the subjects of these two terrible falsehoods, Lord Strathearn, if you please?” asked Leonora sarcastically, as, with the greatest *nonchalance*, she moved a leaf of the geranium blossom Mr. Devereux had given her, from off the top of her diamond brooch which it was hiding.

“One was the visit of Mr. Devereux, which you denied! The other, was the fact of Mr. Selwin’s having proposed to you, which you utterly denied—volunteered to disclaim, because you wished me to believe that no one had ever yet made you a proposal of marriage! Both



statements I soon ascertained to be perfectly false."

"And your informants upon such interesting matters?" asked Leonora in the same flippant tone, just as she had coolly transferred her attention from her flower to the painting on her fan.

"Belinda White and Mr. Devereux himself!" was the reply.

Leonora, as if struck by a sudden spasm, closed the fan on which she had been looking, and clasped her hands tightly together. She knew all hope was over.

"They told me," continued Lord Strathearn, "and from that hour the tie between us was severed. Oh, Miss Stratford!" he added in a voice of anguish, "what could I think of you, when I found you were playing the same game with others you had played with me? Could I think of making such a woman my wife? could I bear the degrading thought? Oh! why did you make me love you—and why make me think that you, too, loved me?—for

this you cannot—dare not—deny. It was the cruel baseness of a depraved heart. It has driven me from you, as it will drive all who know you!” He covered his face with his hand, and for a moment could not speak; and then he said hurriedly, in a voice half choked with emotion, “Farewell, for ever! Farewell! and, when you are in misery yourself—then think of all that you have caused!”

He left the spot, slowly, as he spoke, and his pale and haggard face gleamed through the window as he passed close to where Leonora sat as if turned to stone. As soon as he had disappeared, she looked carefully around, and then rose slowly and walked to the open door through which he had gone. No one was visible, and her heart was relieved of the terrible fear of having been again overheard. She pressed her hand upon her brow, which was throbbing violently, and, drawing a long breath, re-entered the conservatory. As she sat down upon the same seat she had occupied

during the terrible scene through which she had just passed, the last words of her accuser seemed again to vibrate on her ear—

“When you are in misery yourself—then think of all that you have caused!” and so sudden a chill reached her heart that she actually gasped for breath. In that one instant the atrocity of her conduct appeared suddenly to be laid bare before her, and her doom seemed to have been foretold. She had made others miserable! What was she, that she should be the cause of grief to any in the world—least of all to the noble and the good? The words of Lord Strathearn had been prophetic; for had not misery already fallen upon her? Was it not misery—degradation enough—to have lost the love of one like him—one so immeasurably above her in his uprightness, honesty, and truth? And he had spurned her as unworthy of his love—cast her from him, even while he loved her, and this for her baseness and deceit!

A deep feeling of respect for the man who could

thus act, came like a two-edged sword to lacerate afresh her already torn and bleeding heart. She found herself, as it were, forced to honour and respect the very person who had caused her this frightful grief. So vivid was the sense of her own utter unworthiness, that she felt at that instant as though she could have knelt before him, and confessed every error of her life. Never had she been so near a true state of repentance. Her whole bygone career, with its tissue of falsehood and design, rushed upon her mind, and at that moment she abjured it from her soul. In a paroxysm of shame and remorse, she clasped her hands over her eyes, as though to shut out the view her thoughts presented, and exclaimed aloud—

“Better to have worked, toiled night and day, than to have led so dishonourable a life!”

The anguish of her thoughts seemed for a moment too great for her to bear, and she sat as if bowed down beneath it. At length it passed away, and, raising her head, she wiped

from her lustrous eyes the bitter tears of remorse and shame with which they were filled. But, as her feelings became more calm, her wonted courage seemed to return. She cast a slow, searching glance around, as if trying to recognise the spot where she found herself and recall her thoughts to the present; and there, as her eye fell upon her dress, the flower which Mr. Devereux had given her suddenly arrested her wandering gaze. She looked at it fixedly and long, and then she started. A sudden inspiration seemed to light up all her features with a glow of fire. The calmer shade of penitence and sorrow gave way—earthly hopes and fears were rushing to usurp its place.

Leonora started from her seat, as the sound of voices from the other side of the conservatory reached her ear. Her new-found repentance wavered, as the usual current of her thoughts returned. Based upon no surer fabric than a momentary impulse, how could so holy a feeling find a resting-place in the chaos of her

mind? Recalled to present cares and present dangers, Leonora nerved herself afresh. It was no time for fears or lamentation, and the apparent self-command that a cold and callous heart can give, came again to her succour at this trying moment. She saw the danger of her position. She was standing over an abyss, with but one plank to save her from destruction—a single false step must be her ruin. This was her first impression, and her course was instantly taken.

The music had suddenly ceased ; the quadrille was therefore over, and every moment she might expect Mr. Devereux to join her. Experience had shown her that the conservatory was any thing but a safe place for conversation: the solitude of the crowd was far better ; so, with a step winged by fear, she made her way back to the house and took refuge in the blue drawing-room. As she passed one of the large mirrors, she absolutely started at the brilliancy of her own appearance. She had

momentarily forgotten it in the whirl of terrible thoughts that were pressing upon her brain.

She was grateful for any thing that could change the current of her ideas, even for a little while, and gladly seized upon the first vacant seat she could discover. It happened to be in the midst of a group of Whittington ladies, and just those she particularly disliked; but it was wonderful with what complacency she now listened to their insipid conversation: it distracted her from her own griefs; and never had these ladies found her so communicative and so amiable. Mrs. Blakemore's three daughters, particularly, were enchanted with her: they had secretly agreed among themselves that Leonora, who was always "rather distant," would, now that she was rich, grow immeasurably so, and be exceedingly conceited and disagreeable; but their opinion was suddenly reversed. They were allowed to crowd round her in their coarse and scanty muslin gowns, to examine all her ornaments, put their clumsy

fingers upon them (for they never could look without touching); and, moreover, to take the exact inventory of all the bows and puffings of *tulle* on the rose-coloured dress of Leonora, in order to make some frightful imitation of it whenever the next opportunity offered.

A great accession of popularity accrued to Leonora from this well-timed visit to the blue drawing-room; and many people remarked that her riches improved her in more ways than one, for her manners were decidedly more gracious than formerly. She was listening with the greatest patience imaginable to the oft-repeated story of Mrs. Percy Linklater's good fortune, and Sir Edward's generosity; and that lady was assuring her, for at least the twentieth time, "that she did not mean to go and reside at Mr. Percy Linklater's 'other villa,' because she would not abandon her Whittington friends," when Mr. Devereux entered the room. He made his way immediately to the back of Leonora's chair, and forthwith the conversa-

tion of the other ladies was hushed; for Mr. Devereux was a great object in the neighbourhood, and they all wanted to hear what he said.

“Did you stay long in the conservatory?” he whispered, so as no one could possibly hear.

“No—only a moment; it was so very cold,” replied Leonora, rather more audibly, and with a smile she added—“I have been sitting here ever since.”

“The ball-room is not near so hot now, if you like to dance,” he suggested, looking very much pleased.

“Leonora!” asked Lady Alice, who had just come in, “what do you like to dance next? I was thinking of a polka.”

The three Misses Blakemore looked very blank at this proposal, for they were rigidly restricted to quadrilles; but Mr. Devereux whispered, “Oh! say yes. I should so like to dance it with you.”

Leonora smiled graciously, and complied;

Lady Alice immediately ordered the polka, and, followed by her friend, they left the blue drawing-room with Mr. Devereux, and went to get some tea before the dancing recommenced. As they passed again into the ball-room, Mr. Devereux, who had been intently watching the geranium blossoms that Leonora wore, in the hope that they would furnish him with an idea, at last exclaimed—

“So, you have got my flower still, Miss Stratford! I am happy to see. I was afraid you would not wear it, or value it either; you, who have so many fine things.”

“I think, however, you knew that I should do both,” she instantly replied, as, with one of her sweetest smiles, she turned towards him.

The little man was absolutely enchanted, and did not know what he was doing: as he entered the ball-room every thing seemed in a whirl, and he was so dazzled and bewildered, that all the lights appeared to him to be dancing

the polka, which had just begun. Leonora laughed outright as he took hold of her fan instead of her hand: her senses had fully returned to their usual acuteness. She glanced round the room, and then ventured to say to her partner—

“What has become of Sir Edward? I have not seen him for this hour.”


“Gone long ago!” was the reply; “he told me he was going, before I went into the blue drawing-room. I am sure I don’t know how I shall get home to-night, if he happens to forget to send back the carriage, and he is quite crazy enough to do that.”

“We can take you, if you do not mind setting us down first, and then you can take on the carriage,” said Leonora.

“Oh, Miss Stratford, how very kind!” was the grateful reply; but Leonora, whose head was already full of another scheme, did not even hear what he said. Her great object was to get hold of Belinda White, and to find out

from her the true meaning of the ominous whisper by which she had been haunted ever since it reached her ear. It was, however, no such easy matter to find Belinda White disengaged sufficiently to have a moment's private conversation with her. She was such an over popular person that she was continually surrounded; and Leonora knew too well her inveterate love of talking to provoke any communication that she did not mean should be made public. She must, therefore, wait for her opportunity.

But, in spite of waiting and watching, Leonora did not seem to be much nearer the attainment of her object; every time she was at liberty, Belinda was not to be found, and the ball was nearly over, when, after another fruitless search through the rooms, she at length discovered her retreat; she was playing at whist with Lord Glanberris, Mr. Stratford, and another gentleman, in a far off boudoir, where the noise of the music could not be heard. Belinda was therefore still more inaccessible than ever,



for Lord Glanberris, who loved whist in his heart, was a perfect martinet about the game. Leonora just peeped into his hand, saw that he had two by honours, and had too much tact even to say a word. She thought that Belinda White looked very anxiously after her, as she left the room leaning on the arm of Mr. Devereux. There was, however, nothing to be done, and she determined to write to her next day, to beg she would call upon her. Leonora remembered, with a heavy sigh, that she would now have all her mornings to herself.

“When may I call to-morrow, Miss Stratford?” asked Mr. Devereux humbly, as he was helping Leonora to find her cloak. He was very sad because his brother’s carriage had arrived.

“Will you come at four? I shall expect you at four,” she replied in a whisper as she took his arm, but did not even listen to his joyful assent. Four o’clock had been the hour hitherto reserved for Lord Strathearn.

CHAPTER XIV.

THAT night the pillow of Leonora was wet with her tears; but they were tears of mortification and disappointment, as well as those of repentance or shame: but anger was nearly as strong as any other feeling in her ill-regulated heart, when she considered the very simple means that had sufficed to counteract her deep-laid plans. Her self-reproach was unbounded on perceiving that her misfortune appeared to have arisen solely from her own want of caution. That she, who was an adept in every artifice that duplicity ever imagined, should have allowed herself to be thus entrapped, seemed to her almost incomprehensible. But the fact was incontestable—she had clearly outwitted herself, and, in her over-cunning,

wrought the destruction of her own hopes. Her prize had been within her grasp, and she had lost it through her own fault.

The reflection was not pleasant, for so golden an opportunity might never occur again. The suddenness too of the blow made it seem doubly severe ; and the certainty of her fate, as far as Lord Strathearn was concerned, left her no hope of being able, by fresh wiles, to repair the mischief she had done. His words and manner during their strange interview, had plainly told her it was to be their last ; and she had seen how useless it was with him, to attempt to parry the assertions she dared not impugn. He was alike invulnerable to ridicule or entreaty—he had found her wanting in that which he sought for, and he had taken his course immediately. Much as she hated him for it, she could not but respect the feeling that had dictated his conduct. He would not marry a woman in whom he could not confide ; but neither would he condemn her to live on in uncertainty


as to his intentions, or give her a right to ascribe to him motives he had not entertained. And, therefore, he had sought her again, to state to her the plain facts of the case, and impose upon himself the very unwelcome task of placing the falsehood of her conduct in the broad light before her. He was not bound to do this save by honour, and Leonora well knew how little binding that would have been to many, and she found, when too late, that she had undervalued Lord Strathearn. A man so true to himself and his principles, would have been equally true to her, and ought not to have been valued for his rank and wealth only: and she felt that, in losing him and his respect, as well as a lover, she had lost a friend.

As she thought of this, her mind seemed to wander. The same sort of desolate, tossed-about feeling she had so long endured, again took possession of her. Was she then never to be safe—never to be at rest? The voice of conscience whispered, “Never!” and Leonora turned to

her tears again. The overthrow of her hopes seemed to have brought with it an accumulation of dangers; and, to which ever side she looked, comfort seemed rapidly retreating from it. The conduct of Sir Edward Devereux towards her, filled her with alarm: it could be dictated by no common motive. Unless jealousy of Lord Strathearn were the cause, she could assign no other for his sudden estrangement; and even this seemed to her a very unsatisfactory reason for the alteration of his manner. He had not once spoken to her that evening; yet how different he had seemed at the breakfast at the Hermitage! She could in no way account for the change; but it filled her with terror, for her mind reverted to her first interview with him, when he had delivered the letter and the casket. With a shudder she thought of that day. What, if by any means he should have suspected all that she had so carefully concealed? If such was the case, then doubtless he had imparted his suspicions to his friend Lord

Strathearn, and that was the real cause of his sudden departure.

Leonora wrung her hands in despair at the prospect of the terrible exposure that was hanging over her; for one word breathed upon the subject would fire the whole train, and she was utterly without help or defence. Her poor father could lend her no real assistance—he was old and feeble also, and would be prostrated by the blow; perhaps even sink beneath it. The more she reflected, the more imminent the danger of her position appeared. Her reputation would be irretrievably blasted, and that once the case, her difficulties increased a thousandfold. But little hope could then remain of her effecting any marriage at all, much less the only one to which she looked forward with any pleasure—one of grandeur and of wealth. The alternative to which the present complication of her affairs too clearly pointed, filled her with dismay; for poverty and seclusion were to her the greatest



evils to be dreaded. While her father lived she was comparatively safe; but the words of Belinda White continually rung in her ears—"Who can tell what may happen?" They were like demons goading her on, and she felt as if she had no resource left. She must be prompt while there was yet time. One chance of escape still offered, which she must not, dare not refuse—she must marry Stuart Devereux!

It was a wretched fate, and she resolved not to commit herself to it while yet a shadow of hope remained. But the more she thought, the darker seemed the clouds that gathered round her; and the whisper of Belinda was not the least terrifying of the symptoms of her approaching danger. All night long Leonora thought of these things, and not a moment of repose came to soothe her aching brow. The secret torture she endured was dreadful. The next morning did not bring any alleviation to her woes. Mr. Stratford, in the fulness of his heart, said every thing that was most distress-

ing to her. His rapturous compliments on her appearance the preceding evening, sounded like so many covert reproaches; and his innocent expressions of surprise at the absence of Lord Strathearn, and the sudden disappearance of Sir Edward Devereux from the ball, seemed but a mocking echo of her own distracting thoughts. But concealment was no new habit of Leonora's, and, in spite of her sufferings, she smiled upon her affectionate parent with the same ready sweetness she had ever done; nor did she even forget to provide him with ample occupation for the day, so that she might not be importuned by his presence during the visits she expected to receive.


Almost immediately after breakfast was over, she had the satisfaction of seeing his sleek dapple grey pony ambling with him down the road on his way to Winton Park, a journey which he generally made three days in the week; for Lord Glanberris, who dearly prized Mr. Stratford's learning and accomplishments, was sel-

dom satisfied if the day passed without his having seen him. They were both most scientific antiquarians, and this day was to be devoted to the arrangement and deciphering of a whole case of old coins, which had just been sent to Lord Glanberris, and were supposed to be of great rarity and value. Leonora, who, besides this, had given him a variety of messages and commissions, knew that he could not return before the hour for dinner; therefore she was sure of having the whole day to herself—a reprieve from paternal affection and solicitude of which she stood very much in need. The day might be an eventful one to her.

Early in the morning her first care had been to despatch a note to Belinda White, begging of her to call upon her as soon as she had breakfasted. The messenger had not yet come back, and Leonora took her seat in her old place in the bow-window, to watch for his return. Her crochet-work was in her hand; but the blue and white silks floated

loosely over her idle fingers, for she had not energy even to move them, and seemed lost in thought, except that ever and anon she cast wistful glances down the road, expecting to see, if not Belinda White and her umbrella, at least her messenger arrive.

Leonora was dressed in black that day—a common resource with her when she had not a thought unoccupied enough to bestow it upon the cares of her toilet. It made her, however, look yet more pale than she had been ever since she came back from the ball: her face was absolutely like marble, and, though still most beautiful, she seemed to have grown much older since the evening before. She had cried until she seemed to have exhausted her tears, and the only remaining symptom of grief was now and then a convulsive sigh. She longed ardently for the arrival of Belinda White, who could, as she imagined, clear up so many of the mysteries in which she was involved. But Belinda White did not



come. A long hour had passed since Mr. Stratford had departed, and still his lovely daughter sat careworn and trembling with anxiety in the bow window of his drawing-room : while the happy and contented old man rambled on his way, fondly thinking that his idolized child was even more happy and contented than himself.

At last the messenger, who had been sent to the Hermitage, returned, but only to bring a note that filled Leonora with fresh vexation. Belinda White was ill, and confined to her bed : she had caught cold at the ball, and so violent a sore throat was the consequence, that she could scarcely speak. Such an event had never occurred before : Belinda White had the singular talent of never being ill, and it was not on record among the very faithful memories of Whittington, that she had ever been known to pass a whole day in bed. Leonora actually shed tears of annoyance and irritation at this new *contretemps*. It seemed as if all

things, even to the merest trifles, were arrayed against her, to make her position still more embarrassing. She wanted particularly to see Belinda White that day: for the next might be too late; with her gossiping propensities, no secret was safe with her a moment. Before night, half the ladies of the village would probably have passed all their idle moments by the side of her bed. It was impossible to say what she might tell; and the most alarming part of the business was, that Leonora did not in the least know what information it was in her power to impart. As this point too nearly concerned her own interests, she felt that it was most imprudent to leave it to chance.

Leonora therefore determined, weary and worn out as she was, to go immediately to the Hermitage; she need not be more than an hour away, so that she would still be at home in time for her afternoon visitors. It was not more than five minutes' drive to the Hermitage; so she rang the bell and ordered her pony carriage, for she

had not strength to walk. This caused a great delay, but it was unavoidable, and she sat quivering with impatience until she heard the carriage leaving the stable-yard: and then she got up gladly, intending to proceed to her own room to get her bonnet and shawl, so as to be ready. Just as she passed through the hall, she was met by a servant, who, apparently, had been enjoying the fresh air on the steps of the door, and now said hastily to Leonora—

“Sir Edward Devereux is riding up the road, ma’am. Is the carriage to come round?”

“No—not till he is gone,” she replied, with apparent coolness; but her heart beat wildly as she returned to the drawing-room to receive him.

CHAPTER XV.

It would have been difficult to say whether fear or pleasure was the predominant feeling in the breast of Leonora as Sir Edward entered the room. She tried to say something about his coming being unexpected, but the words died upon her lips. She remembered how ill her cordiality had been received by Lord Strathearn but a few hours before, and she felt as if suddenly frozen. She could only extend her hand to him, and a mechanical smile played upon her lips ; but as he said a few words of commonplace greeting, she fixed her eyes steadily upon his face, in order to ascertain if possible the nature of his thoughts.

There was not much to be gained from the

examination of his countenance ; for there was an implacably mournful look in it, which seemed to imply that few other thoughts had yet mingled with the one sorrow that was consuming him. He was paler and thinner, too, than when she had last seen him, and certainly justified the general opinion that he was sinking fast and never could recover. Leonora felt a fiendish pleasure dart through her own griefs, as she thought of the possibility of his being removed from her path.

“You did not stay long at the ball last night, Sir Edward,” she said to him after she had answered his formal inquiry as to Mr. Stratford’s health.

“I was too ill—I could not bear the heat and the noise ; but I stayed long enough to admire the beauty of your dress. Your jewels were splendid, Miss Stratford,” he replied.

“Were they not? I am so glad you admired them. I thought you did not see them,” she exclaimed with childish vivacity ; and she im-

mediately recounted to him the whole story of the legacy, exactly as she knew he had heard it. She had told it so often, that she knew it perfectly by heart. Sir Edward allowed her to go on to the end: he wanted to persuade himself afresh of her utter worthlessness and falsehood; for his struggle to avoid the anguish through which he now had to pass had been very great. He was not a stern man, but very determined and uncompromising in his ideas of honour and of faith. He knew that, with regard to Leonora, he had a duty to perform—he had hitherto shrunk from it, but the hour was come, and he was there to fulfil his promise. As soon as she had ended her tale, he said—

“Miss Stratford, you might be aware that it is not to talk of jewels or of balls that I am here to-day.”

“No—I hope it is to see me, Sir Edward. You have been so long away that I think you must have forgotten all about me,” she answered, with a charming smile and with an inno-

cent air, and again fixing her beautiful eyes full on his face.

"No—Miss Stratford, I am not likely to forget any thing about you," said Sir Edward with an emphasis she did not like; and then he added quickly, "it is of yourself I would speak to you, and if you have any regard for yourself, you will answer me truly. You may think my words strange, but I have imperative reasons for what I say. I have been told that you are going to be married to my brother."

"Me! What an idea! What an excellent idea!" she exclaimed, bursting out into a pretty joyous laugh, as if what he had said was the best joke in the world. Sir Edward was not in the least deceived by her. He quietly leaned back in his chair, which was exactly opposite the sofa on which she sat, and, when her gaiety had a little subsided, he went on—


"I do not pretend to say the matter is signed and sealed; but I know that Stuart has been for some time paying you the most

marked attention; and your manner last night most decidedly showed that you did not disapprove of that attention—you cannot deny that, Miss Stratford.”

“My dear Sir Edward,” she replied, putting on a gentle, fawning manner, “how you run away with a story! you get to the end before there is a beginning. I never had the slightest idea of marrying your brother: I have never till this moment heard a word about it. I certainly have not forbidden his visits, and last night I danced with him; but cannot you guess the reason?” and she cast her eyes down timidly.

“There was none wanting but your own pleasure,” he replied.

“And if it was my pleasure, Sir Edward, for whose sake did I encourage him? I should think you might know; though I suppose I ought not to tell you. It was because he was *your* brother—because, as I did not see you, I wanted to hear of you, and I had no other



way. Was that so very wrong?" and she looked up in his face with a beseeching look, while the tone of her voice was so caressing, that few could have resisted its charm. It was a despairing effort, but it did not succeed; her hearer had made himself too certain of her dreadful duplicity to be so easily deceived, and he said in a firm tone—

"Pardon me, Miss Stratford; but I can neither believe your assertion, nor accept your excuse, flattered as I must be by it." Leonora saw that she was working in vain; and, suddenly changing her tactics, said, in a laughing manner—


"And if I was going to commit so fearful imprudence as to marry a poor younger brother, who or what is to prevent me?"

"Your own conscience, Miss Stratford!" replied Sir Edward, solemnly; and then he added in a lower tone, and with a still paler cheek than before, "and the shade of Filippo Colonna."

In spite of her efforts to prevent it, a faint cry escaped her as the name passed the lips of Sir Edward, and she leaned back in her chair, her face as white and rigid as marble. Sir Edward continued, in a tone more of deep sorrow than severity—

“Are you not afraid that it should rise and confront you, even at the altar? Dare you stand there with a lie in your heart, if not upon your lips, and deceive a man who thinks you spotless and true? Miss Stratford, there is but one way you can ever marry with honour to yourself, with justice to him who is ready to make you his wife: a free confession alone can save you from farther infamy and disgrace. If you have made this to my brother, and that he consents to overlook the past, I have no more to say. If you have not done so, then I warn you that the painful task must be mine.”

The few moments which these words had occupied, gave to Leonora time to recover par-



tially from the stunning blow she had received; and she said, with a well-assumed air of dignity and offended pride—

“Sir Edward! I do not know by what right you speak to me in this manner, or what are the grave charges you seek to bring against me! I have not the least idea what you mean.”

A shudder passed over her hearer at this speech, and, with more severity than he had yet used, he said—

“My right to protect a brother from disgrace is not to be contested. My accusations are true, as you are well aware. Miss Stratford! do not suppose that you can deceive me by your arts! I know all! The Marchese Colonna, upon his death-bed, confided to me your secret and his own; at the same time that he charged me to deliver to you the letter which I gave you, and the jewels which you wore last night, and bade me to tell you *never* to forget him. Had you a heart, you would know the meaning of that prayer.”

"I do not see what all this is to me," replied Leonora, still hoping to escape by her obdurate denial of facts; "there is not one word of truth in all you may have heard."

"Now, may God forgive you for your double sin!" exclaimed Sir Edward, getting up hastily; for he was so inexpressibly shocked at the barefaced depravity of this artful girl, that he could not endure to look upon her. "Miss Stratford! I can listen to no more! The voice of him who, murdered by my hand, is lying in his grave, now rings in my ears and knocks upon my heart. I witnessed his agony, and listened to his tale of sorrow and of love; and I swore to him to do as I have done. I have fulfilled my vow. Forgive me! think upon my words, and repent ere it be too late."

"I have nothing to repent of that I know particularly, though I suppose every one has some small faults; but those with which you charge me so readily, Sir Edward, I utterly and fearlessly deny," replied Leonora in a

steady voice, as she also rose, and stood proudly before her accuser.

His patience was, however, exhausted, and the look of disgust and contempt that he cast upon her, would have humbled to the dust any woman less hardened and debased.

“Miss Stratford!” he said coldly, “your words are vain. With your past life I have nothing more to do, and your odious falsehoods freeze me to the heart. There can be nothing now between us but a formal matter of business. I am my brother’s guardian; he is my heir, and totally dependent upon me. I never will consent to his marriage with you; therefore you see the profitless speculation it would be. You understand me? Farewell!” He moved towards the door as he spoke; but Leonora, trembling with anger, which she tried to conceal, stopped him by a hasty gesture as she said—

“Stay, Sir Edward! I will be as explicit as yourself. I scorn your imputations; and, as to

the marriage, I never did intend to marry your brother, and I never will! I am not yet fallen so low;" and, with a highly indignant air, she reseated herself upon the sofa.

"Would that I could believe you!" replied Sir Edward in a low voice; and, with a look full of horror, he turned away and left the room.

"All is lost!" whispered Leonora as the door closed, and for a moment she covered her face with her hands; and then suddenly she started up, exclaiming—"But no! not yet!" and, going to the writing-table, she began to write.

CHAPTER XVI.

SCARCELY two hours had elapsed when that little drawing-room at The Cliffs, with its moss-patterned carpet and rose-bedecked chintz—mute witnesses of many dexterously shifted scenes—presented another appearance. Leonora, who had changed her dress, was lying upon the sofa in the prettiest *peignoir* imaginable, composed of the softest white muslin, and trimmed with lace and floating pink ribbons.

Nothing could be more artistic than the attitude in which she leaned, her left hand gracefully supporting her head, and the falling back of the open sleeve showing her matchless arm, white, delicate, and rounded, as if by the skilful hand of the sculptor. The room was slightly darkened, the perfume of the

flowers stole softly in through the curtained window, and a gentle air of languor and repose pervaded the whole apartment. It was a pity that so fair a scene should have been got up for an object so unworthy; but Leonora, true to herself, was playing out her part to the end, and the accessories, so useful to the embellishment of the last act, were not likely to have been neglected by her.

A crisis in her fate had arrived. She had ventured all upon one throw; she had won, and triumph sat upon her brow. She looked radiant, and the smiles that chased each other round her coral lips, might have been mistaken for smiles of happiness by those who could not read her heart. But to read that heart would have been a sad and weary task; for, as she lay there leaning upon one fair hand, the other was locked in that of Stuart Devereux, who sat by her side. She was now his affianced wife. If, however, the real sentiments of Leonora were well concealed, those of her

newly betrothed were very visible. He actually grinned with delight; his mouth seemed extended from ear to ear, his face was crimson, and his round light eyes looked as if they were starting out of their sockets. Leonora thought she had never seen him look half so frightful; but her choice was made, and the credulous being by her side was the screen that must stand between her and the scorn of the world.

Her danger was too imminent to have admitted of delay, and she had saved herself, as she thought, by the sacrifice of another. It was a fearful penalty to pay; but it was only the beginning of the retribution so justly due to her misdeeds. As she lay upon her sofa, her busy thoughts wandered far and fast. Mr. Devereux was much too happy to talk; all he could do was to settle and resettle the sparkling rings upon the hand of Leonora, and now and then put it to his lips, a ceremony of which she did not even appear conscious. After a

somewhat protracted silence, she at length turned to him and said—

“Now, you understand me exactly, and all my motives for wishing our marriage to be a profound secret until it has actually taken place?”

“Perfectly!” replied Mr. Devereux, looking, as he imagined, very serious and business-like. “I am quite convinced that, with Mr. Stratford’s insuperable objections to your making so bad a match, it could not be managed in any other way; and I feel the sacrifice you are about to make for my sake, in leaving his house clandestinely! but there is nothing else to be done.”

“Unless to part—and for ever!” said Leonora with a languishing look, and a gentle pressure of the fat hand in which her own was enclosed.

“Oh! do not say such a thing!” he exclaimed with a shudder. “It is too cruel! I cannot even bear to lose you for a day! Why do you

drive me away the very instant you have promised to be mine?"

"Because it is absolutely necessary; you know I should not insist upon it if it were not," and another tender pressure of her hand attested the veracity of her words.

"But one day!" pleaded the anxious lover.

"No; not a day, not even an hour, must be lost: unless, as I have said before, we mean to part for ever! My father's objections to the marriage are very strong—much stronger than you can be aware of; and he is not a man to be trifled with," and Leonora looked anxiously into the face of her future husband.

"I know that; I have always observed that Mr. Stratford is a man of very decided opinions," replied Mr. Devereux, who thought himself a great judge of character.

"Too decided, perhaps," answered Leonora, shaking her head: "for it is impossible to make the least impression upon him; but recollect, Stuart," she added more gravely, "whatever

may be his faults, he is my father, and I am bound to obey him. If once he issues his orders for your exclusion from this house, and forbids me to see you, I own to you frankly that I shall obey him, and you will see me no more. Obedience to a father is now my first duty. Remember, I am not a wife yet!" and she smiled archly as she concluded her speech.

"No; but you are an angel!" exclaimed poor Stuart, rapturously kissing her hand; "you are perfect in every thing you do, and I will be guided entirely by you, now and ever," he added, as he gazed fondly upon her, and smoothed down the lace on the edge of her *peignoir*, as it hung from the sofa on his knee.

"That is quite right!" said Leonora with a gay laugh; "a total abnegation of self is the first duty of a married man." The last words sounded pleasantly to the ear of Mr. Devereux, and he readily replied—

"Well, then, what am I to do? Give me your orders, and I will obey."

"This seems to me our best plan," said Leonora, sitting upright upon the sofa, and looking very serious.

"You must go to town to-morrow very early. You will have time enough to get the licence, and engage rooms for us at some good hotel; and then, if you will come down again by the night train, and wait at the station, I will meet you there the next morning, and we can go to London by the twelve o'clock train. You must not mind my being married without all the usual bridal array: in our position we must endure a few hardships."

"What would I not endure for your sake, my beloved angel! my adored Leonora!" he exclaimed heroically.

"The first thing you must do for your adored Leonora," she playfully replied, "is hermetically to seal your lips. If you say one word to your brother, we are ruined for ever. I have reason to know that he would be still

more violent against our marriage even than my father."

"No, really! but why should he?" inquired Mr. Devereux with a startled look; for he had fully determined to tell every thing to Sir Edward, who, though he did not dislike, he dearly loved to make jealous, which he always imagined was the case when his poor younger brother obtained any signal success.

"Oh! I have my reasons," was Leonora's reply, accompanied by a very sagacious smile. "He might be angry; perhaps a little spiteful."

"Spiteful!" echoed Mr. Devereux; "what should make him spiteful?"

"My dear Mr. Devereux——"

"Mr. Devereux!" interrupted he, piteously.

"Well, then, Stuart—my dear Stuart, you might know that there is but one reason why a young gentleman should be spiteful to a young lady."

"And that is"—persisted the intelligent youth.

"I have not time to tell you now," interrupted Leonora gaily; "I will tell you all about it some day soon."

"When we are married!" said Mr. Devereux triumphantly; he was never tired of repeating the words.


"Exactly so—but now go, my dear Stuart. I expect papa in directly, and I would not for worlds that he should find you here!"

"And if he asks you who you have seen?" he inquired, looking very cunning.

"Then of course I should tell him: I never tell any stories. In my opinion, a little story is as wrong as a great falsehood."

"What a dear angel you are!" rapturously exclaimed her lover; "so beautiful and so good! and kind enough to throw it all away upon me too;" and, as he again kissed her hand, he looked as if he was just going to cry. Leonora laughed outright.

"I am so glad to hear you laugh," he said kindly; "when I first came in, and saw you



lying here, I thought you were ill, and I felt so sorry my heart quite sunk all in a moment."

"Oh! I am not ill, only tired," she replied, with a very visible expression of weariness upon her fine features.

"How shall I know how you are all to-morrow? I shall be miserable to be away so long," he said sadly.

"We shall meet next day," was the comforting reply; "and then you know, after our little wedding tour, we can come back here and be so comfortable. Papa will be very angry at first, but you can talk him over by degrees. I think you can be very persuasive when you like," and she gave him one of her old smiles—one of those sweet seducing smiles that had turned his foolish head, and really made him think her, "an angel!"

"Good-bye, then, my own Leonora!" he whispered tenderly; "good-bye, and may Heaven bless you, as I do!"


"Good-bye!" said Leonora rather less warm-

ly, but putting both her hands into his. He pressed them to his heart, and then suddenly, and before she was aware of it, put his arm round her, and kissed her lips and cheek for the first time. Leonora recoiled from his touch as she would have done from that of a serpent; but she dared not speak, and he only attributed the action to maiden modesty, and thought her still more perfect every moment.

At last he tore himself away, though with endless protestations of sorrow, and Leonora, released from his presence, hurried to her own room. She had a great deal to do ere she could allow herself to think, much less to weep, over the hard path she had been obliged to choose. Her first care was to give orders that she should be denied to all visitors. She now dreaded the recovery of Belinda White, to whom she had despatched a note of inquiries. She would not for worlds have seen her, or any one, until, returned from her hurried and secret nuptials, she might set the scandal of the world

at defiance. Till that moment arrived, she was as if standing on a volcano: every instant might be the fatal one, and immediate destruction ensue. She determined that no false move upon her part should accelerate her doom.


Secure in her seclusion, she turned her attention to the preparations necessary for her journey. They were of the most scanty description, for she was to come back in five or six days; but still they occupied a great part of the following day, and the next was the one fixed for her departure. Her great difficulty arose from her not being certain whether Mr. Stratford would, on that particular morning, make his accustomed pilgrimage to Winton Park, early enough to admit of her leaving the house unobserved. It was, however, not an insurmountable difficulty; indeed, few were to Leonora when they only consisted of words. Still, she much preferred his being from home when the moment of her departure arrived; for, in spite of the callousness of her heart,



she could not shut her eyes to the heavy blow she was about to inflict upon one who had never been to her other than an affectionate and devoted parent, idolizing her very caprices.

She knew, that give it what colouring she might, the very name of a clandestine marriage would be odious to her father; and the cruel position in which he would be placed with regard to Sir Edward Devereux, would but aggravate the evils of the case. She, however, soon contrived to palliate to herself the sin she was about to commit, by the reflection that his sufferings would be far less on the discovery of her marriage, than they would have been had any exposure of her former life taken place—a catastrophe, of which she was firmly persuaded she was in hourly danger, and from which an immediate marriage could alone save her.

This impression had, day by day, grown stronger, and still continually urged her on; though the certainty of her father's grief was not unfelt by her. All these thoughts did not promise




that her accustomed tranquillity would remain undisturbed, if a formal parting from Mr. Stratford was to take place. He was constantly in the habit of coming to the door when she was going out, either to admire her driving, examine her ponies, or impress upon her the necessity of caution. What, if he should choose the moment of her wilful abandonment of his roof, for bestowing upon her one of his paternal admonitions? She felt that she could not endure it; and this impression did not tend to calm the trouble of her mind.

During the whole of the day a thousand devices were imagined and thrown aside, when, as if Fate had determined by its own propitiousness to drive her on upon her infamous course, Mr. Stratford, during dinner, informed her that he was to breakfast with Lord Glanberris early the next morning. The examination of the coins had proved a more tedious business than had been anticipated, and would be a work of time. His aid was of

great importance, and therefore he had promised to devote the whole day to his friend. Nothing could suit better with the plans of Leonora.

When the morning came, she cautiously avoided taking any leave of her father, but watched from the window of her room, which was directly over that of the drawing-room. She soon saw him riding down the road, his sturdy, quick-stepping dapple-grey pony looking fresh and brisk as he sniffed the morning air. It was not until horse and rider had turned the corner of the park, that she began to feel what she had done; but at that moment such an utter sense of desolation fell upon her, that her heart seemed to die within her; and the tears coursed each other down her cheeks. But the present was no time to weep. Hastily completing her preparations, she dressed herself in her travelling attire, and summoning her maid, whom she informed that she was going on a visit, and would require her services, she was soon on her way to the sta-



tion; having first, as is the custom of most such heroines, deposited a letter upon her father's table.

It was more than two hours afterwards that the little groom, who had been ordered to bring back the ponies at a foot's pace, drove quietly into the stable-yard; but it was near evening before any one thought of inquiring of him, whether Miss Stratford would be home to dinner or not; and then the boy said very simply—"That he thought not, for she had gone to London by the train."

CHAPTER XVII.


As soon as this information had been imparted by the groom, it spread gradually through the household. It was not that they thought it strange or startling, but it was something new; it was a derangement of the clock-work regularity that peculiarly distinguished all proceedings belonging to Mr. Stratford and The Cliffs. An over exactitude and attention to hours was one of his few weaknesses—he could not bear that any thing should be a moment too early or too late; and even Leonora herself carefully studied this fancy, and never kept him an instant waiting. This it was, perhaps, that caused a sensation of wonder when the sudden journey of Miss Stratford was announced; but it was not until it

was also discovered that her maid had gone with her, that the circle of domestics began to feel somewhat fidgety and alarmed.

Something must have happened to cause this sudden flight; but the truth was far from being suspected. Every body walked about the house in a very unusual manner, as if they imagined, though they dare not hope, that some mute object would elucidate the mystery. At last the butler, in going his rounds in his master's room, espied the letter of Leonora upon the table. An immediate summoning of the whole household was the consequence, and a variety of conflicting opinions were given and rejected with astonishing rapidity. Still no one was nearer to the truth, when, in the very hottest of the debate, Mr. Stratford was seen slowly riding up to the house. Every eye turned to him as he passed the windows, his placid handsome face lighted up by a tranquil smile, as he looked upon his trees and his flowers, and the pretty house, so endeared to

him by memories of the past and the waking bliss of the present. He passed on, that happy kind old man, with his long silver hair shading his thin face, and, as he disappeared, so did the little knot of anxious dependants who had gathered in his room. One by one they all went upon their way ; for, by an inexplicable impression, no one cared to meet him at that moment, or to be the first to tell him that his daughter had not returned. Time enough when the question should be asked.

In the meanwhile, Mr. Stratford, who had met the groom at the corner of the yard, dismounted, and entered the house by the front door, which was standing open. His servant, who could not help being slightly on the watch, heard him first go into the drawing-room, and then retire to his own, and then nothing more was heard for a considerable time. There was therefore nothing amiss, and the vague apprehensions which had been hinted, rather than spoken, died away in silence. Each person secretly



felt relieved, and the butler retreated to his pantry, and the maids sat down to their tea, exactly as if nothing had happened; only they were rather ashamed of having been so excited without a cause, and meddled and talked about what, after all, did not concern them.

The household, however, was not long destined to enjoy its repose. Before many minutes had passed, Mr. Stratford's bell rung violently. Every body started to their feet; but as his own servant alone attended in his library, no one ventured to accompany him. He hurried up-stairs; but no sooner could he have reached the room, than the ringing began again more furiously than before. It was no time for ceremony, and every servant in the house rushed up-stairs, and into the library, when a sight awaited them for which they were little prepared. Mr. Stratford was sitting speechless in his chair!

A few unintelligible sounds were all he could utter, and even these soon became inaudible,

while his eyes gradually closed. It was evident to all that he was dying. The suppressed cries and shrieks of the affrighted and horror-stricken women did not even seem to reach his ear; and while the most collected instantly left the room to summon medical aid, the rest looked from one to the other as if to ask the cause of this sudden bereavement.

They were not long left in ignorance; the letter of Leonora lay at the feet of her father, and in a few moments every one had possessed themselves of its contents. Comments were vain—the result was before their eyes—and one and all forbore at that moment from question or remark. The unfortunate man was carried to his bed; the surgeon arrived, and all that care and kindness could do was done; but without avail. The sudden shock had killed him; the blood had rushed to the brain, and he never spoke again. In a few hours his most intimate friends, hastily summoned by the physician, arrived; and, ere morning dawned,

Lord Glanberris, Sir Edward Devereux, and Belinda White, stood around the bed of the dying man. He still breathed, but was totally unconscious; and so he lingered on till the sun was high in the heavens, and then with a gentle sigh he expired. It was almost at the same hour that his daughter became a bride.

The consternation which this heart-rending event excited, was only equalled by the sorrow that was the tribute of every heart; for Mr. Stratford had been generally beloved. But most poignant was the regret of two of the actors in this sad scene: Sir Edward Devereux and Belinda White, as they bent over the body of their departed friend, severally accused themselves of being accessories to his untimely death. The horror with which they both regarded the perfidious daughter who thus wantonly had dealt the fatal blow, was far too great for words; and the name of Leonora was scarcely mentioned during the solemn days that followed. The house was closed, and the

sorrowing friends withdrew to their own homes, to await the coming of that mournful hour, when they would follow to its last resting-place the inanimate form of him they had loved so well. Two days afterwards a letter from Leonora arrived—but there was no one to open it, and it was laid, with many others that had come for Mr. Stratford, upon his own table in the library, until some further orders should be received.

It was on the evening before the day appointed for the funeral to take place, that a carriage drove up to the house. The quick step of the horses, the loud knock at the hall door, and the sharp ringing of the bell, were all so many sounds that thrilled through the heart with fear and dismay. That awe-struck feeling which the house of death inspires was suddenly disturbed. One by one the servants crept up to the front hall, where the coffin with its funereal draperies was placed in order to be in readiness for the ceremony of the morrow.

Lights were burning at a distance, but they only made the scene more dismal still; and the loud knock repeated on the door, seemed a fresh mocking insult to the dead. With trembling hands it was unfastened, and Leonora and her husband entered. This was their welcome home!

END OF VOL. II.





